Lady Draped In Crimson

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Lady Draped In Crimson

by PhantomTopHat

Summary

Black widow spiders are known for killing their sexual partners, the same could be said about the up and coming seral killer. When a man known for his high social statues is found in a run down motel with his throat sliced open along with a derogatory word carved above the head board Will is called to the scene. But he wasn't dragged out of bed just for a simple cut throat. No, the man also had his reproductive organs cut off.
Now Will has to figure out four things. Who the killer is, what's their motivation, when will they strike next, and if he should take Alana's advice and call the women who was obviously interested in him at the coffee shop.

Notes

Well looks like I have face planted hard back into my Hannibal phase. It's also been hot minute since I've written a Hannibal fanfiction, luckily my skills at writing have grown.

This chapter is centered around the crime scene.

Hope you guys enjoy :)

Vacancy

Whore the origin of the word could be traced back to the Old English word hōre, to mean prostitute or harlot. It was a word that would be used as a weapon against any women who dared to step out of the conventional line that men carved into society with a jagged knife and then they were told to walk straight. It was often thrown during fits of anger as a low blow insult, ment to latch its talons in to the targets mind and drag them down with its weight. In all honesty it was a pathetic clawing attempt to get the upper hand for the caster to feel superior. Only to fail miserably and revile how pathetic they truly were in the end. During the passage of time the word had lost the edge that it once held, it was pushed back to make room for sharper words that when released caused far worse harm. But like any dull knife that lay in the back of the utensil drawer abandoned for months at a time if pressed into the skin it still had the ability cut.

At the moment though the word was crudely carved into the tacky floral wallpaper of a cheap motel. If asked the carving might be considered an improvement over the dark river algae green and the poor attempt at white flowers that littered the walls. If one squinted the identity of the flower could be chalked up to a poor man's excuse of a rose. White roses are often talked about being the symbol of purity, or young love. The idea of the wall being decorated with the flower seemed like an oxymoron.

But Will was not standing in some no tell motel bedroom at seven in the morning to criticize the hideous choice of wall paper. No, he stood in the middle of the bedroom to stare at the dead body that lay spread eagle on the queen size bed. Blood almost as dark as ink from a newly opened pen easily seeping into the just as tacky floral bed cover; Will had to give it to the motel for sticking with a theme.

The body was discovered by an under paid maid; who barely understood a lick of English, earlier that morning. With the help of an eager to please rookie cop. Who could actually make out the words the maid; later identified as Miss. Gyeon, was saying through a mix of broken English, Korean and the greatest cause for speech issues, fear. What was supposed to a simple daily job of coming in to strip the sheets and make it look as though the room was professionally cleaned turned into something out of a nightmare for her.

Beverly was the first one to greet him as he stepped under the yellow caution tape that held back the crowd of on lookers. A mixture of passersby who let curiosity lead them over and tenets who were staying at the motel for only two reasons. One being they scrapped the bottom of the barrel on cheap places they could afford and two they were there for a late night of sloppy pleasure followed by a regretful morning. Where the motel was located, a place a mother would warn their young child to never go near and a father would shake their head in disappointment when they found out their child did take residents. Along with it's obvious neglect on the outside appearance. It did not take a special agent or even a knock off Sherlock Holmes to deduce what residents occupied the grounds the most.

With the flashing red and blue lights thanks to the cop cars that held as a backup boarder if the caution tape failed and the constant flicker of the motel's old neon sign, that in its prime

might have been a brilliant white now rendered down to a dull dirty yellow. Will was surprised he hadn't suffered a seizer as he walked up to motel.

"Hey," Beverly greeted as she began to walk close to Will, easily matching his speed or lack of. It was an unspoken fact to anyone that Will did not like to be close to people, he often made sure there was a good ruler's length between himself and anyone who circulated is personal space. Yet, Beverly was one of the few acceptations. He didn't mind walking so close next to her; they were practically rubbing elbows as they took their stride. The women gave off the type of warmth that Will would describe as a cool autumn heat, something he enjoyed being next to. Far better than most on somedays. "Jack's talking with the manager of this place," she said as she subtly guided Will towards the crime scene, located on the second floor of the motel. "So, he sent me down to collect you." She smiled softly.

"I didn't know Jack conducted interviews, he's always the one to pass that job off to some lackey." Will said as they began to walk towards the stairs.

"Guess he wanted to dust off the old bones to prove appoint." Beverly said as she dodged an investigator who came rushing down the stairs.

"That or he might be the only one with the ability to put the manager in their place. Stubbornness against stubbornness." Will caught a slight smirk on Beverly's face as they began to go up the stairs together.

"Either way I'm glad it's not me doing it, I hated talking to those creeps. They're all the same, some forty something year old man with a receding hair line, poor grooming habits and the social skills of a jack ass." The two made it to the second floor.

"Yeah, when you've been in this line of work for so long, they all just begin to merge together to form one ugly profile. Just like the motels you can find them in." Will said as he glanced over the railing to get a look at the shuffle of police and now news reporters, that somehow got a whiff of the murder. He wondered if he could spot Freddie from the crowd; her vibrant red hair was always an easy eye catcher. The room was located at the end of the walk way, the only room with any traffic coming in and out.

There was a loud pop that caused him to jump slightly and back away from the railing; if Beverly noticed she didn't show any sign of it, something he would always be grateful for. The last thing he needed was word getting back to Lecter that small noises now had him jumping like a flea on a dog, that was conversation he would very much like to avoid; like the plague that one of those fleas might be carrying. The two looked up to where the sound could have originated from to discover that the old and most likely not faithful neon sigh had finally gone out. Eliminating one source of light to make room for the rising sun.

As they approached the room Will could easily spot Jack standing right outside the door. With one arm crossed over his chest and his other hand pinched the bridge of his nose. Will looked across from the man to see another much shorter and stouter man. Who wore a stained bowling shirt, a pair of over used basketball shorts; even though it was the middle of fall, and to top off the walking fashion disaster sundae a pair of over the calf socks and sandals. The man was leaning against the guard rail with one hand shoved into his pocket and the other raised in a nonchalant manner. *That must be the manager.* Will thought as they continued to

approach. “You were right about the managers being all forty something with receding hair lines, too bad you didn’t say anything about their awful choice in fashion though.” Will whispered to Beverly, who let out a chuckle.

Jack let out a frustrated huff before he pointed for the man to leave. The manager just shrugged and took the signal, Will and Beverly quickly made room for the man. Both leaned as far back as they could as he walked past them mumbling something under his breath.

“Looks like you're right about their smell as well.” Will said brining out another soft chuckle from Beverly before they resumed their walk over to Jack, who seemed to be trying to walk off his frustration in the small space. But the feeling was left aside when he spotted Will’s approach.

“Glad you could join us Will.” Jack said. Will felt the urge for a sarcastic retort about having a choice in the matter, but he held his tongue and just nodded his head. Beverly walked past the two to join her team inside. Taking her warmth with her and leaving Will with the cool morning air and Jack’s explanation on what awaits him. “The victim’s right inside, he was discovered around six twenty-five this morning by one Miss. Gyeon. The officer that responded laid one eye on the scene and assumed it was another Ripper case and called us in,” Jack let out a huff of air, ran a hand over his face and shook his head slightly. “Turns out the only thing close to this being Ripper related in the slightest is the missing body part MO.” Jack said as he turned his head to look inside the room to see how the investigators were handling things without his watchful eyes.

“Well, you know what they say about assuming.” Will said as he tried to subtly glance past the doorframe; away to hype himself up for what horror might be waiting for him. “If it’s not the Ripper than why bring me in?” Will asked, he knew Jack liked him in the field, but he was only used for the big cases. So far all he knew was this was a simple motel room murder, something they could handle without his guiding mind.

“Because this isn’t the first time a murder like this has passed my desk,” Jack began to guided Will inside, “this one will be the second time.” He answered as he stepped away from Will, to give the man the space he needed to soak up the crime scene.

The room was the standard size for any one-star motel and it was decorated as such. With a warped wooden dresser that had mix matched handles by the door, it was at an odd angle, by the indentations in the carpet the dresser was moved; shoved or bumped into. A busted television laid next to it; a vivid spot on the dresser in a nearly perfect rectangle indicated where television use to sit, confirming the dresser was bumped or shoved. By it was the bathroom, it probably had a flimsy shower that was put there out of regulation; hardly ever used only if the actions of the night before called for it. With each step that took place in the room a smell of smoke would be kicked up into the air. Adding to the off-brand air freshener ment to hide the staining scent of the smoke that hid in the carpet and the now pronounced sharp tang of blood. But Will also could detect something else that laid beneath the two battling scents, something elegant, something that didn’t belong.

Will wasn’t going to lie to himself, he had seen worse. The hype up wasn’t really necessary for him, after seeing bodies being turned into pieces of macabre art a simple sliced throat could almost be seen as a tame act in his eyes. To even compare it to what the Ripper had put

on display for them in the past would be seen as an insult. Will quickly shook the thoughts out of his head, he began to feel disgusted with the idea that he had started to think of the Ripper as an artist who needed to be defended. The Ripper was a murderer, just like the person who left the body behind. They were not cut from the same cloth, they were not sown into the same style of suits, but they were sold in the same store.

The man that lay dead on the queen-sized bed; without proper identification, Will guessed was in his mid-maybe late fifties. Will took a slow step to get a closer look, to take in the massacre better from what he could see from the far end of the room. He gave Zeller a look of acknowledgment as he stepped to the right side of the bed. Zeller returned the look with a slight nod and went back to taking pictures of the body.

Will bent over slightly to take in more of the man's appearance, his skin was an odd bronze color; brought on only be the either the sun or ultra-violent lights, but since it was mid fall and the tan looked like something only the summer sun could bring Will guessed the latter. He took noticed of the artificial black that stained the man's hair, but a few grey whisps still managed to break through the dye. What teeth that peeked past the man's slightly opened mouth were a bleached white. *He was tempting to stop his own aging process; he lived in a state of denial.* Will thought as he glanced down at the deep red line that decorated the man's throat, like an unwelcome scarf. *The cut was made quick and precise, the murder had done this before they knew how to move the blade. How the skin would react to being sliced into.*

Will continued to move his eyes down the body and stopped when he got past the man's stomach. His sight was met with the aggressive splatter of dark red that coated most if not all of the lower part to the man's body. If the cut on the man's throat was a scarf than this was a blanket.

"What body part was taken?" Will asked as he pride his eyes away from the bottomless stain of red. He could probably guess the answer just by the location of the blood, but he didn't want to jump to conclusions. Especially if what he assumed was cut off wasn't true.

"I'm going to let you answer that one Price." Zeller replied, speaking for the first time since Will showed up. He had a playful smirk that he tried to hide behind his half-lowered camera. Jimmy popped his head from inside the bathroom; how Will didn't see him in there earlier he would never know.

"Let see um," Jimmy fumbled with his words as he walked out of the bathroom, with Will's questioning eyes and Zeller's amusement the other man was becoming flustered in answering the question. The investigator took a deep breath and let the feeling roll off his back. "It seems that the assailant took the liberty of cutting off and taking John Doe's well,"

"John and Does." Zeller finished with another smirk that he sent towards Jimmy, either because he got to get under the man's skin so easily or the way he substituted the words for penis and balls. Jimmy just glared at Zeller in return.

"They're not in the room, the assailant took the body parts with them?" Will asked as he glanced between the two, making sure he received the answer right.

"Looked all over this place, just finished searching the bathroom, I found traces of blood on the shower drain, the assailant must have taken a shower after the killing. But no sighs of the missing body parts." Jimmy answered as he looked towards Jack in a way to inform his boss of the job he just finished.

"Just like the man's identity it's another mystery to solve." Zeller commented as he raised his camera to continue his job.

"Not anymore," Beverly stepped around the corner with a black alligator skin wallet held up in her hand. "Found this in the vic's pants which were in the closet along with the rest of his belongings." She said as she opened the wallet and pulled out a driver's license. "His name is Eric Salazar born April fifth, nineteen fifty-eight." Beverly ran her fingers through the wallet and let out a whistle. "This defiantly wasn't about the cash. There is over a thousand dollars in this and at least two platinum credit cards." She added before dropping the wallet and what it held in an evidence bag.

"Salazar, Salazer, why does that name sound so familiar?" Zeller asked. Everyone just exchanged looks for a moment before Jimmy snapped his fingers together or he attempted it to; it was rather hard to snap gloved fingers.

"I got it, Eric Salazar he was plastered all over the media a few months back for throwing this crazy soiree that got out of hand when someone brought in a live tiger."

"I remember reading about that apparently the tiger got loose and nearly mauled one of the guests and in the panic several people were injured. It took everything for this guy's publicist to get that incident swept under the rug. Along with a hefty donation to a wild life protection organization." Beverly said before she looked back at the wallet. "But with the kind of cash to this man's name why leave the wallet and what's inside?"

Because it was never about the money, was it? Will thought as he looked back over the body now identified as one Eric Salazar. "Do we know if he had sex before he died?" He asked not pointing the question to anyone in particular. "This could possibly be sexually motivated crime, by the indication of his um organs being removed." Will added as he tried to justified his question. The three just looked at each other.

"Well?" Jack spoke from where he stood as he questioned the maturity of his team.

"I found a nearly in take roll of condoms in Mister Salazar's pocket, man was definitely expecting to get lucky. One was taken, not sure though if it was used this night or not." Beverly answered.

"I didn't find anything in the bathroom."

"Nothing around the bed either."

You're using your body aren't you, that's the only way to lead them into your trap.

"Do you believe there was any sexual action going on here, Will?" Jack asked bring Will out of thoughts. Will looked away from the body and towards the other man.

“I believe that could be away for the murderer to get close enough, using their body to get his attention and the act of sex to lower his guard and to get him vulnerable for the attack.” He answered before he turned his attention away from Jack, to look at the word carved above the head board. *But who are you actually calling a whore?* Will looked around the room one more time; letting the information take root, before he walked back over to Jack. *Time for the show.*

“You need us to clear out?” He asked and Will just nodded his head. Jack let a high pitch whistle that caught everyone’s attention and made Will jump for the second time that morning. “Alright everyone clear the room!” He ordered before he placed his hand right below Will’s elbow. “Let me know when you’re done. Or if you need out.” He said in a much lower voice before he walked out with everyone following him like ducklings.

Will stepped back into the center of the room, it was just him and Mister Salazar. He closed his eyes and took a steady breath, not paying attention to the smell of smoke, or the dull buzz form the ceiling light. Just his own heartbeat and lingering presences every killer left behind for him to slip into. The golden pendulum swung.

Once. The blood that covered Eric’s dead body disappeared.

Twice. The word carved in the wall was erased and now Eric sat at the foot of the bed fully clothed and smiling with his blinding white teeth towards Will. His throat no longer sliced open and he was fully intact.

Thrice. Will took a deep breath. It was time to press play.

“I barely have time to close the door, before Mister Salazar is on me. He’s not attacking, he’s not fighting for his life, he just wants one thing from me and that’s my body. Mister Salazar doesn’t know what he has brought into this room. Not yet.” Eric pressed rough hungry kisses into Will’s neck, his hand grabbed tightly onto the soft mounds of his ass, he squeezed only a few times before moving to his waist where his grip tightened. He pulled Will away from the door and Will let him, Eric in all his haste to get him closer into the room accidently knocked Will into the dresser causing the television to fall to the floor. Will chuckled at the mistake, he barely looked back up at the man before Eric harshly grabbed Will’s face and crudely pushed their lips together. The man was hungry for one thing and one thing only. He was not going to let any small amount of property damage stop him.

Eric’s hands left his face and began to explore his body again, pulling them closer, tighter together and he was back to assaulting Will’s neck with sloppy kisses and small nips. A poor attempt at playing rough. “I’m letting Mister Salazar believe I find the way he handles my body is acceptable, even though every inch of me is hating being in the same room with the man.” Will rolled his neck to the side to give the other more surface to latch onto as he ran his hands up and down Eric’s back imitating an affection that wasn’t there as he mirrored the frenzy of lust he was being given. Their bodies grind together in a heat of promised sexual intimacy. The hands that were fine with exploring Will’s body when it was clothed quickly found themselves snaking up his shirt to feel his skin. Eric grabbed hold of Will’s shirt and pulled it over his head right before he pushed the other man onto the bed without any warning.

“I’m going to ravish every inch of your body doll face.” Eric said in a heavy breath as he began to take off his own shirt and he flashed Will with yet another obnoxiously white smile. A smile Will felt the urge to punch and leave a bloody gummy mess in its place. But he just smiled back.

“You promise.” He purred before he sat up and crawled towards Eric and for the first time in their dance of mocked passion initiated the kiss. His hand lightly grabbed the back of the man’s head, he deepened the kiss as he guided Eric over top him. They only broke away when Eric realized the thing holding him back from the land of ecstasy was his own pants. “May I get that for you?” Will asked in a soft submissive tone; a fake tone. Eric licked his raw lips and jerkily nodded before he leaned back. “I’m giving Mister Salazar the false security of being in control of the situation. He in fact isn’t, he never was not since we arrived to this place. Not since I closed the door.” Will said while he unbuttoned Eric’s slacks and slowly unzipped the zipper.

“The actual act of Mister Salazar sexual escapade is short lived, he was only into pleasuring himself not carrying about whether I enjoyed it or not,” Will moved off the bed, Eric didn’t pay any mind to the act. He was to lost in the fading high that followed what he thought was an exponentially good time for the two. “That was something I expected when I started the ruse. Men like him only think of themselves.” Will walked back around to the foot of the bed and slowly crawled towards the man; a wolf finally shedding the sheep costume, a sly smile played at his lips.

“Hate to disappoint you doll face, but I’m not in the mood for another round.” Eric said as he closed his eyes and rested his head back on the pillow.

“Hate to disappoint you, but this was never about what you wanted.” Will said his voice laced with a dominate persona, that had been hidden through the whole encounter. It caught Eric off guard, before the man could question the sudden mood change Will had already grabbed hold of the man’s shaft.

“What are you,”

“With a swift efficient motion, I cut off Mister Salazar penis.” Blood erupted from the wound in the same volume of the man’s pain filled screams. The man with flailing limbs tried to kick Will away and go to cover his now gapping wound. All while his groin acted like an erupted volcano, easily covering the two with its explosion of vital fluid. With a quick hand Will easily stabbed the weapon into Eric’s neck; taking the man off guard, and yanked it to the side. “I am quick to silence Mister Salazar, I don’t get the same sense of pleasure I did from my first act of cutting into his body. This was just to make things easier for me. To buy me more time.”

Eric tried to lift his hands towards his throat. To stop the liquid that poured out, but his hands shook too much from a mixture of shock and blood loss. It also didn’t help that Will gently took the man’s hands and pushed them back onto the bed; all while hushing the man in a mock sense of security. “I do however feel a small amount of that pleasure as I watch Mister Salazar struggle to cling onto his life, while he loses all the control that I let him believe he had. This is my design.”

A Simple Cup Of Coffee

Chapter Summary

Will Graham has his very own cliché Hallmark moment.

Chapter Notes

God this chapter took longer than I thought, who knew writing a coffee shop scene could be so time consuming. All those coffee shop Au writers are definitely on a whole new level I'll give them that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Coffee, Will Graham needed, no he required coffee to be able to function for the rest of the already bustle of the day. For any normal functioning person their day would start off with a simple cup of the energy inducing caffeine. But for Will; who never even considered himself normal in the slightest, the morning started with his cell phone waking him up at an odd hour in the morning. With Jack on the other end of the phone requiring his assistance at a possible Ripper crime scene. They all knew better now, but at that moment of time Will thought it was The Ripper emerging from whatever dark blood-soaked cavern that beast of a psychopath called its home just like Jack did. The profiler only had enough time to get his dogs situated for the day, before he had to take off. Not enough to at least pour himself a travel mug of what some would consider their life fuel. *Didn't want to keep Uncle Jack waiting.*

Will was blessed in the end of it though, when after he managed to explain what he put together at the motel room for Jack, he was able to break away as the coroner packed up Mister Salazar's body and the evidence needed to be processed. At Jack's words "We'll come get you when we need you." He was excused, it wasn't exactly a thanks for you impute, but it was away out and Will was going to take it.

He never made it a habit of stopping at coffee shops, he hated the crowded spaces, the ear-piercing clanking of the equipment, and the endless amount of small talk that no one ever bothered to keep at a low volume. Will often preferred something simple from his small counter top coffee maker; one of the few Christmas presents that he actually was thankful for. But he didn't really have a choice in the matter, not when he had to rush out to meet up with Jack followed by a class he had to teach. When his days would line themselves up like that, a coffee shop was a saving grace. He could tempt to get a decent cup from the coffee maker that sat in the break room, but Will was sure that machine was older than he was; it was there on his first day of work and probably be there when he retired. Plus, it wasn't known for

brewing the best cup. If it brewed a cup at all; why no one just threw the thing away was something no one would understand.

Yet the one shop he did sometimes stop by, he would place in the realm of acceptable. The cafè wasn't that bad, not as cramped as most and not as loud. There was a soft constant string of jazz playing through the hidden speakers that seemed to be keeping the voices of the patrons at a low volume and it soaked up just the right amount of tempted awkward silence. The shop was one of the few of it's breed that Will actually didn't mind stopping in time to time. Thanks to its location being close to the academy and it's almost hole in the wall status.

He placed his order with the stunningly cheery cashier; who couldn't be any older than one of his students. The cashier took his name and payment with a sweet smile and told him it be only a few minutes, Will returned the smile with something tamer than the one she gave him. It wasn't forced, he knew how to smile at a stranger and have actual warmth behind it; no matter what others might think. He gave a small thanks before he walked over to a small high table by the window and took a seat on the wooden barstool, letting the morning sun bake into his back. Will slowly closed his eyes and let the soft warmth from the sun guide his body backwards until he was leaning against the storefront window. Will understood why his dogs could just lay on the porch for hours in the spots of sun that scattered throughout the day; especially in the morning. There was a comfort that only the morning sun could bring, that would draw any living being to it and they would be welcomed to bask in its soft warmth for however long they wanted. With a deep breath Will soaked in the atmosphere as a whole, with the rich scent of coffee mixed with fresh baked goods, the low song in the back ground and the now and again soft chime of bell from the door being opened; letting whoever ran the front know that there was a new customer.

"Caffè Mocha for one Will!" The barista called as they sat the hot drink down on the counter, before they went back to their work, jostling the man out of his basking session. Will opened his eyes and made his way over to his drink. He picked it up and lifted it slightly; to give a signal to the barista as a thanks. Before he took a single sip of the simple semi-sweet coffee. He could tell it wouldn't be enough to get him though the day, but it would hold him over until the next time he could replace it with something else, something stronger. But the drink would never be able to fulfill the simple request, as soon as Will turned and took one step away from the counter someone crashed into him. There wasn't enough force from the accidental run in to cause either one of them to fall to the floor, but in the collision Will's coffee was not spared. He was thankful that the hot liquid didn't spill all over him, he didn't really have a spare set of shirts on hand and he wouldn't be able to stand in front of his lecture hall with a coffee stain; people already gave him odd glances a coffee stain would just increase the on lookers. Instead, the cup fell from his loose grip and onto the floor, out pored the light brown liquid. His shoes were not spared in the impact splash and neither where the nicer pair of black pumps that stood only a few inches in front of him.

"Oh my god I am so sorry!" Will looked up from the coffee that pooled at their feet to finally acknowledge who bumped into him. There stood a woman a few inches away, she was probably a handful of years older than Will; if he had to guess, nicely dressed best described as business attire and she was a babbling mess of apologies. Will managed to decipher the mess. She kept repeating, how she really should have looked to where she was going, how

she was always not paying attention to her surrounding and how she too focused on her phone call.

“It’s fine.” Will stated simply as he tried not to come off as hostile and frustrated at an honest accident, he took a step back to achieve that ruler distance he required to have with others. But the women didn’t seem to pick up on the subtle gesture as she moved closer to him.

“No, it’s not fine, I really should have been paying more to my surroundings,” she said with a flustered chuckle as she tucked a strand of her long black hair behind her ear. The women looked down at the puddle of spilled mocha they still stood in. Will could easily pick up the embarrassment that rolled off her body and he felt a twinge of guilt for bringing it out of her. He was about to reassure that it was indeed fine and that there really wasn’t much for them to do about it, until she looked up at him and suddenly all the embarrassment she had was almost nonexistent. “Let me buy you a new one.” Will looked at her with small disbelief.

“No, really it’s alright you don’t have to.” He stammered with a wavering smile and a slight shake of his head as he looked away from her and towards the door. The gesture to buy him a new cup was a kind offer and a welcoming one; for most people, but Will wasn’t like most people. He just wanted to get the exchange over with and move on, he’d be fine without a cup of coffee to give him a boost; he’d just have to grab an energy drink from the machines that littered the campus. The thought of having an energy drink this early almost brought a chuckle to his lips, it was accompanied with the idea of Lecter somehow finding out and the man would definitely have something to say about Will acting like one of his students, guzzling down a chemically induced caffeinated drink that was nothing but artificial flavors. Lecter already voiced his opinion on Will’s eating habits. *Why not add fuel to that small fire while at it.*

“I insist,” The women said with a smile as she placed a light touch on his right arm and Will turned his attention back to her again. “And I won’t take no for an answer.” She gave a playful wink and began to walk towards the casher; sealing Will’s fate. Before she stopped and looked back at Will and placed a fingertip to her lips and exhaled a chuckle. “Um what did you order?”

Will blinked as he tried to catch up to the exchange, “Oh um caffè mocha.” He answered, his voice sounded tight as he tried to swallow the lump that had formed in his throat. The women’s smile widened.

“Gotcha.” She said as she walked over to the cashier. Will watched as the two exchanged information, the women turned once to point out the spill then back to Will and gave him a small wave with her fingers, as if she was letting him know that he was still in her thoughts. Will just lifted his hand slightly to return the wave. The women turned back to the cashier; she must have said something funny because both of them chuckled, before the women pulled her wallet out of her purse and paid. Will tried not to focus from that point on; he began to look around the coffee shop. At the dark wooden shelves that either had coffee bean bags or assorted knickknacks, the small amount of people that sat at the tables or stood by the counter, or the baristas that effortlessly moved around the equipment as they fulfilled the orders that poured in.

This can't be happening. He thought to himself as he looked down at his feet and finally decided to move out of the spilled mess.

"Okay our order will only take a couple minutes, why don't we have a seat." The women said as she placed her wallet back into her purse catching Will off guard.

"Okay uh let's." He said with a jerk of a nod and the two walked back over to the table Will sat at only a few minutes prior. *This is going to be long couple minutes.* He thought to himself as he took his original seat and the women sat down across from him. Will already thought he had his fill of being social for the day; got it out of the way earlier that morning. But now he was about to over stuff himself with this interaction. He could already taste the stale awkward silence followed by bitterness of small talk finished with a second serving of stale awkward silence.

"Oh, I also picked us something to have while we wait," The women placed two light brown triangular shaped pastries on the table; they looked delicious. "That way we have something to snack on so we don't have to wait in some god-awful awkward silence or try too hard to make small talk." She said with a light laugh, before she picked up her pastry and took a bite. The deliciousness was confirmed by how she all but moaned into the bite. Will looked down at the baked good then back at her.

"You didn't have to buy me this, you already bought me a new coffee." He objected, but the women held up a hand, she placed the other in front of her mouth and shook her head slightly before she swallowed.

"I bought these because one I still feel *really* bad about the coffee," Will caught how she emphasized the word really; the twinge of guilt he felt early began to grow. "And two I'm a sucker for apple cinnamon anything." She playfully leaned forward. "My names Miranda by the way. I think it's about time to introduce ourselves." Miranda held her hand out.

"Will." He said after he rubbed his hands on his jean pants; the last thing he wanted to do was embarrass himself with sweaty palms, and he gently shook her hand. Her hand was soft and warm, but Will could feel the subtle hint of callouses and her handshake laid between firm and loose, but it held authority. Will couldn't stop his brain as he began to take in the rest of her; a profile began to be born. The clothes she wore; a light maroon blouse with a black overcoat, she had well maintained manicured nails. *Probably has appointments placed throughout the year.* Her makeup was lightly applied, it enhanced her already attractive features. Like her softly round cheekbones that were brought out by the little use of highlighter, the fullness of her lips that the light red of her lipstick complimented, and the way her eyeliner drew the right amount of attention to her almond shaped eyes. The makeup was a compliment. *She knows she's attractive, she doesn't need to dress up for others approval, she does not need a confidence boost that some nice clothes or make up might bring. She's already confident with herself as a whole. But it does make her feel good maybe even superior and that's all that matters to her*

The way Miranda had taken charge of the coffee situation, going from frazzled to confident in the mist of almost seconds. She let little to no room for Will to put up an argument when it came to her wanting to replace the spilled drink. She put herself in control; even if Will wanted to be in control himself, she wasn't going to let it happen. *She's used to being in*

charge of all her situations. She'll never have it any other way, might even put up a fight if it comes down to it. If Will had to guess from her appearance and how she carried herself, she was most likely someone who worked at place where one's appearances and strong attitude is a requirement. She might be a manager somewhere, but by the brand of her purse; which was a brand he overheard Beverley dream about owning, she might be even higher on the ranks. *Lawyer, Doctor, maybe even a CEO. To early to tell though.*

"Well, it's nice to meet you Will," Miranda chuckled softly as they let go of each other's hand and something deep inside Will that he couldn't place emerged; it had him wanting to go back to holding that warm welcoming hand. It felt odd. "Now try the scone I was told they were fresh out of the oven and they are to die for." This time it was Will's turn to chuckle as he picked up the still warm pastry and took a bit. Miranda was right, the crisp sweetness from the apple easily danced with the spicy tang of the cinnamon. There was a reason the two were always paired together in any form. The buttery crust that held the flavors together melted on his tongue. The scone easily reminded him of a homemade apple pie and he enjoyed it.

"I can see why you like it, they're like,"

"Mini apple pies." Miranda finished his sentenced and the two shared a laugh. "It's simple, somethings are best enjoyed as simple." She added before she took another bite and Will mirrored her action.

"Sometimes simple is better." Will commented.

"Yeah, but not all the time. Sometimes you need a little bustle in your day to get the blood going. Sure, you can stay in your comfort zone stick to a schedule, but then you'd miss out on those unexpected surprises that one can only find stepping off the beaten track they've made." Miranda's lips formed a smirk as her eyes lightly trailed over Will, who felt a warmth slowly bloom in his chest. "But then again the simple things can easily bring you back when you feel like you have wondered too far away."

"Two American Jets for one Miranda!"

"Looks like *our* order is ready." Miranda said as she left Will to continue to eat his scone and mull over what she had to say about simple things. Was it really that bad for him to want things simple for once. It was less for his brain to focus on and he already felt like he was running on over drive on a daily basis. Simple could easily give him a break. Simple was something close to normal for him. "Here we go," Miranda returned setting down the to-go cup in front of Will as she returned to her seat. "I hope you like it." She added before she took a sip as she peered from over her lid to watch Will do the same.

Will was taken back by the sudden dark flavor that washed over his tongue. This was not the simple sweet taste that a caffè mocha brought. There was no light dash of chocolate married with the mild flavor of coffee. The new drink was rich and dark there was no room for any light flavors to be had. There was a right amount of bitterness, that with each sip a nip to his tastebuds was felt before the hot liquid traveled past his mouth and rushed down his throat and pooled warmly in his stomach. The coffee was ment to be consumed slowly to be relished in, not to be something you'd just down on the go. It would definitely last him throughout the day.

“This is not what I ordered.” Will said with an astonished chuckle as he sat down his cup. “What is this?” He asked and Miranda took one more sip her of drink.

“In all honesty I forgot what you ordered after I explained what happed to the lovely cashier, so I just got you what I thought would taste good,” She chuckled “It’s called an American Jet, which is just a darker version of the basic americano, I think there might an extra espresso shot in there or something like that.” Miranda answered as she took another sip and soft realization crossed her face as she lowered her drink. “You don’t like it,” she clicked her tongue and shook her head “once again I am so sorry it seems I’m just messing up with your coffee enjoyment.”

“No, no, no it’s alright,” Will quickly jumped in to sooth, “I actually really do like it, it’s different from what I mostly have and that’s nice.” He said with a small smile as he took another sip just to prove his point. He wasn’t lying when he said it was different. Will mostly stuck with a medium dark roast followed with a spoon or two of sugar. The caffè mocha wasn’t something he always had, but he felt that odd need to almost treat himself. To indulge his sweet tooth for once. The closes thing he had to a drink like the one Miranda had ordered for him was the cup of coffee Lecter had given him that one morning he came over. It was only lightly sweetened thanks to the one spoon of sugar that was put into even though the sugar did almost nothing to curve the dark flavors that swayed in the delicate glass cup. It wasn’t something he was used to and he liked it even though he hadn’t said anything then, at that point in time a cup of coffee was a cup of coffee to him.

“Well, I’m glad you like it, guess I did get one thing right.” Miranda said as she straightened up in her seat.

“Actually, you got two things right,” Miranda slightly tilted her head to the side and knitted her eyebrows. “The scones here are to die for.” Will lightly tapped the half-eaten baked good that still sat on the table. They shared another soft laugh, Miranda took a breath and opened her mouth to say something, but she was cut off by a very catchy jingle at a pitch that only a cellphone could sing. Will subconsciously began to search himself for his phone, even though a small voice told him that the jingle could not possibly come from his own phone.

“Oh, that’s mine.” Miranda said as she fished her phone out her purse and looked to see who was calling her, Will noticed the subtle way she rolled her eyes; he often did the same thing when Jack called him. “Hello this is Miss Rhettford.” Her tone had shifted from the light playful one she had used with Will to something on the lines of serious more businesslike. Will sat there as he tried not to seem like he was focusing on what Miranda was saying to whoever was on the other side of the line, he at least wanted to give her that decency. In stead he turned his attention to the traffic that ran back and forth in front of the shop and towards the people who would walk by now and again. He was only brought back when he heard a frustrated sigh and the sound of a phone being thrown into a purse.

“Well, that was my assistant looks like I’m needed down at the work shop earlier than planned.” Miranda sighed as she grabbed her bag and coffee cup as she began to slide off her stool. Will began to do the same thing.

“Yeah, I better get going as well, my classes start pretty soon and finding a good parking spot can be a real pain sometimes.” Will said as he grabbed his cup and scone. *I’ll finish it on the*

drive over. "It was a pleasure to meet and thanks again for the coffee and scone." He said as he began to leave.

"Wait," Will stopped and turned back to see Miranda scribbling something down at the table before she turned back and held out a small piece of note pad paper. "I mostly don't do this, but it was nice to sit and talk with you," Will could easily see where this was going and he was no where near prepared for it. "I would very much like to do it again sometime, hopefully soon." She said with a bashful smile; a smile Will couldn't predict that she was able to make in the first place.

"I don't really." Will was caught off as Miranda slipped the paper in his free hand.

"Just think it over, for me." She said with a slyer smile as she squeezed his hand, before she hurried out of the shop before Will could say anything else. Leaving the man there wondering if what just happened really happened to him. He looked down at the neatly written phone number and the little note underneath it that read,

Call me soon, Miranda.

"So, Who's Miranda?" Will looked up from his laptop a bit startled from the previously dead quiet classroom. He was a little surprised to see Alana with a friendly smile standing by his desk, he really should have been able to hear her come in, but he had to admit he was too drawn into the case file Jack had sent him.

It was the file from the previous homicide that took place only a month prior. It had been buried under paper work and pushed to the side; like most cases often were until something like what had happened earlier brought them to the surface. It often took another life another tragedy to get the attention that a case desperately needed in the first place. The set up was similar to what happened to Eric Salazar. One star no tell motel, left naked on the bed, neck slashed, penis and balls cut off and taken. The victim was identified as Lloyd Banks, a man in his early sixties and unlike Eric, Lloyd wasn't afraid of ageing. His skin wasn't overly tanned, no bleached white teeth and his hair was its natural shade of dusty blond with a soft mixture of silver. The crime scene was almost an identical match.

Will had noticed a differences when he looked over the file of the crime scene. The word carved above the head board. Instead of whore the word that was etched into the wood was *Bitch.* Yet another derogatory word that was often spit at women. *Are you calling yourself this, or the men you killed? Is it just another way to humiliate them, another step-in emasculation even when their dead.*

"I'm sorry I didn't catch that." Will apologized as he slowly closed his laptop; he didn't want Alana to see even a glimpse of the bloody body of Mister Banks that was plastered on his screen, and he turned himself in his chair so she knew all his attention was on her. Alana just chuckled and shook her head slightly.

"I asked, who is Miranda?" She repeated as she tapped at Will's coffee cup with the name written in black marker across the middle. "You're not stealing other people's drinks are you Will?" she asked playfully "Because as a special FBI agent you should know better, or at

least hide your evidence better than this." Will grinned at the joke and let out his own soft chuckle as he leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms.

"No, I didn't steal someone else's coffee. Miranda is a woman I met at the coffee shop I sometimes stop by." Alana perked up at the idea of Will meeting someone.

"Oh, really was she nice?" She asked as she sat at the edge of his desk, encouraging the topic to continue. Will ran hand over his mouth; a sign of his discomfort battling with another emotion.

"I mean yeah I guess, we sat and talked for a while as we waited for our drinks." Will answered with a nonchalant wave his arm. "She also bought me a scone so we didn't have sit in silence or make small talk." He added for some reason he didn't know why. Maybe because with Alana talking just came out easier for him. Even though he knew sometimes she treated him as something to be studied or preserved, she also treated him as though nothing he had to say wasn't taking up too much of her time. Even if it was something mundane like meeting someone at a coffee shop.

"That was very considerate of her to do," Alana out of all people knew how much Will hated small talk and awkward silences. She leaned forward with a sly smile "Did she also give you her number?" She asked. It must have been plastered on his face, because the sly smile transformed into a grin. "Really." She sounded surprised, but not in a dishearten, I can't believe someone finds you interesting kind of way, but I'm happy for you, kind of way.

"Yes, she gave me her number after we said our goodbyes, said she'd like to see me again." Will answered. "And she wants me to call her sometime." He mumbled.

"Well, are you going to call her?" Alana asked eyebrows raised, head tilted slightly and her mouth forming a quirked line.

"I don't know," Will said as he leaned forward on to his desk as he clasped his hands together. Alana noticed how his leg began to bounce in an anxious manner. "I'm not much for the dating scene, I don't think it'll be good idea." Alana placed a gentle hand on Will's and he turned to look up her reassuring smile.

"I think it'll be good for you," Will opened his mouth, but Alana held up a hand. "You need something to get you out of this world full of death that you surround yourself in."

"I have my dogs, my hobbies, you, and Doctor Lecter."

"I know that, but sometimes Will you need a little more than what Hannibal and I can provide. This," Alana tapped on the cup, "might be that little something." She smiled and squeezed his hand before she stood up. "Giver her a call, let yourself have something different in your life."

"I understand what you're saying Alana I do, but I don't think I can. I'm not good with people, you of all people should know this."

“Well then I’m not leaving this spot until you do.” Alana said as she crossed her arms and tried to give a serious look to a very unserious situation. Will just stared at her with a bewildered look on his face.

“You can’t be serious.” He halfheartedly chucked.

“Yes sir, I am dead serious. I am not leaving this spot until you, Will Graham call this Miranda up and make a date with her.” Alana said as she uncrossed her arms and placed her hands on her hips. “And that’s a doctors order.”

“Really you’re pulling out the doctor card, last time I checked you didn’t want to be my doctor in the first place.”

“Don’t try to low ball me Will,” Alana narrowed her eyes, “Or I’ll call up Doctor Lecter and see what he has to say.” That was last person Will wanted to know about his dating habits or lack of; he’d rather tell Jack then the polished psychiatrist any day.

“Alright you win I surrender,” Will chuckled as he slid his phone out of his back pocket and pulled the number from his blazer pocket. “You fight dirty you know that.” He added as he typed in the number; Alana just shrugged as she didn’t even try to hide her amusement. Will dialed the number, his heart pounded heavily in his chest. “It’s ringing.” Will informed as he looked at Alana. “I’ll doubt she’ll even pick,” Will was caught off.

“Hello this is Miss Rhettford, who may this be?”

“Hello Miranda, yeah it’s me Will from this morning,” He smiled as he rubbed the back of his neck and he began to swerve back and forth in his chair.

“Will, what a surprise.” Will could hear the smile that was on her lips

“Yeah, I’m surprised too, listen I was wondering if you’d like to,” Will’s mouth suddenly felt dry, his words were catching in his throat and nothing could push them past his lips.

“You were wondering if I’d like to go out with you?” Miranda filled in and Will hung his head in embarrassment and let out breath.

“Yes that.” He said sheepishly, he must have sounded pathetic, probably looked like it too in front of Alana. Miranda chuckled lightly in amusement on the other end of the call.

“I’d love to, I actually ment it when I said I wanted to see you again soon. How about tomorrow night. There is this small art gallery that’s known to showcase local pieces.”

“That sounds nice then maybe afterwards we can if you’re feeling up to it get something to eat.” Will said finally able to put in his idea on the date he was supposed to set up in the first place. He glanced over at Alana who gave him and encouraging thumbs up and look that told him he was doing good. There was a moment of silence on the other end and for a second Will thought he screwed up his chance.

“That’s a nice idea let’s do that as well, I’ll text you the address we can meet up around seven thirty.” Will let out a heavy breath and smiled.

“Sounds good I uh can’t wait.”

“Good, well I have to go my assistant is knocking at the door. See you tomorrow night.”

“See you tomorrow.” With that Will hung up, he felt all the built-up tension spill out of his body leaving him feeling a sort of light high and he slowly turned to Alana; who had the biggest grin he had ever seen the woman have. He on the other hand a look the tittered between disbelief and utter shock.

“So.” Alana sang

“I’m seeing her tomorrow night; we’re going to a small art gallery she’s going to text me the address.” Will blinked a few times. “I can’t believe this is happening.”

“I can,” Alana placed hand on his shoulder, “You deserve something normal and I’m proud of you for stepping out of your comfort zone.” She smiled.

“Even if you had to bend my arm to get me to do it?”

“Even if I had to bend your arm to get you to do it.” She chuckled giving his shoulder a pat before she turned to leave. The psychiatrist looked over her shoulder and nearly giggled when she caught the realization sink into Will’s mind.

This is really happening. He thought.

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal Lecter will making his first appearance in the next chapter :)

The Art Of Flirtation

Chapter Summary

Will has his first date with Miranda and it turned out better than he thought it might.

Chapter Notes

God damn this chapter was a beast to tame. I also wanted to point out yes I did add some new tags. While going over the story as a whole I realized somethings needed to be added so no one got caught off guard. Hope you guys enjoy the chapter :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jack kept to his word; the next day Will was called down to meet with the rest of the team. Like one of his loyal dogs when called Will came. He stood close to the corkboard, new information mixed with old was pinned to it. Things Will had already figured out, like how the killer was most likely female, there was an intimacy to the kills; a closeness only a women could achieve on such a basic human level. His fist initial thought about the sex was confirmed when he read the interviews with the two managers, how they both confirmed that the men had checked into the motel under false names; Will wasn't surprised, and how they noticed that a woman would wait outside the office. With her back turned and she always stood just outside their full view and like every nearly run-down motel the cameras were for show and not for actual use. The confirmation grew while he went over the interviews with the friends and loved ones. When the question about if the victims were ever interested in a same sex partner the interviewers were either laughed at for the ridiculous question, or they were shouted at for the implication. The outbursts were always followed with examples of how other men knew better then to try anything with the victims and how women just couldn't get enough. *These men probably had a habit of intimidating other men with their wealth and social statues, while they also used it as a way to lure women towards them. That's a behavior you are looking for when choosing your targets aren't you. You want a peacock, not some pigeon you'd see around the city.*

Another part of information he picked up was how Banks was her first kill. Unlike Salazar, Will noted the hesitation in the throat cut. The line was too jagged an indication she had struggled with the motion of the blade; the murder weapon was still yet to be determined. *You probably didn't plan to slice Mister Banks' throat that night. You were hoping he'd just pass out from blood loss. But you adapted quickly and went back to your original plan of to rid the man of his reproductive organs.*

A new part of information that was on the board was how the victims' testicles were removed after their death. *You wanted them to suffer from the major lose, wanted them to witness the mutilation you brought on to them. Before you had to finish them off with a sliced throat. The testicle removal was just to mock the dead.* Will thought as his eyes traveled and his brain began to make small connections. He still had trouble with the words that were carved on the walls, even though the words had the same venom he could not tell who was the intended victim for the toxin to be injected with. *If it was the men why the wall, when carving the words in their chest could add on to the humiliation. If you are calling yourself this, is it because you are, deep down disgusted with what you are doing? But that can't be true can it, you feel too much pleasure in the act of putting these men in their place.*

"What do we have so far on this guy?" Jack asked as he stood next to Will, his arms crossed as he began to study the evidence as well.

"Woman."

"Pardon?"

"The killer is a woman. Probably someone in the same age range as the women these men find attractive." Will scratched the back of his head and gestured towards the board. It wasn't much to go off on, but it helped narrow down the suspect pool. Something to help the group reach their goal on catching the murderer.

"That makes sense, Mister Salazar and Banks both fall under the stereotypical masculine trop, there is no way they'd let any man come near them like the murderer did," Beverly stood from her seat at the conference table and walked a little closer to the two men, who acknowledged her presents besides them. "Not unless they were injected with something."

"Tox screen came back clean on both victims, so they were definitely not drugged." Jimmy chimed in from his spot at the table.

"She doesn't have to, she knows these men have a type, someone who is easily impressed by what they have to offer and submissive. She'll easily put on the façade to get close." Will said as he turned away from the board so he could let the information roll around in his mind.

"But why have sex with them, you yourself mentioned how she finds the act disgusting. Why not just get them alone and then you know." Zeller waved a hand at the board.

"My guess is because she wants these men as vulnerable as possible and the only way for her to do so is to play into their own sexual desires. Even if she herself hates the intentions that it brings." Will answered. "She'll do anything to get them where she wants them." He added nearly under his breath.

"Okay we know the killer is women and we know how she's getting close, but we still haven't figured out why. What makes these men so special to her." Jack said as he tapped on the head shots of Salazar and Banks.

"We know she has a type, wealthy men with high social statues. When looking into their backgrounds these two had a lot in common. Both were born into money, neither one of them

had to work for it. They both also really liked to flaunt it as well, Banks here was known for his gala events. He'd throw one like they were baseballs and these things were huge. I mean royals were known to show up." Beverly held an almost impressed looked.

"So, what you four are saying is that, we are looking for a young woman who goes after rich older men who like to show off how rich they are." Jack stated as he looked at his team, who shared a look that said *Yep that's pretty much it*. Will could feel the patience leaving the man as they seemed be running out of answers to give and were now just trying to fill the blanks as soon as possible. It made him feel like he was trying to fill in a cross-word puzzle without looking at the hints or brining out a dictionary. He hated to feel like that.

"She might think they don't deserve the life they were given." Will added as he took off his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose. It made sense to him; the killings could be classed as an act of jealousy. The evidence pointed to it, these men were born into wealth and took it for granted. They would show it off, rub it in others faces when they had the chance. But he knew there was something else there, something just out of reach. If it was just jealousy then why take the genitals, why the emasculation? "It might be too early to tell though." Will added in a soft voice, he knew that wasn't something Jack wanted to hear, but the man had to be reminded that Will wasn't a miracle worker and that his mind sometimes needed time to think. Not just a day and a half. Yes, he could make leaps like no one else could, but now and again his muscles did get sore and his joints locked on him.

Jack let out a sigh, before he excused everyone to go and continue on with the case. Will felt bad for not being able to give him all the answers that the man was looking for. He wanted to be someone Jack could rely on when they hit a brick wall, but what good was he when he too was about to crash into the exact same wall as everyone else. Will watched as Jack left the room followed by both Jimmy and Zeller, he was given the opportunity he needed.

"Beverly, hold on a second." The laid-back women stopped at the door and turned to her friend.

"Yeah, what's up?" She asked with a raised eyebrow as she crossed her arms. A stance she was known to make.

"I need some advice," Beverly had a look of intrigue painted on her face as she waited for Will to continue. Will took a deep beath and tried to ignore the nerves that danced below his skin. "I have a date tonight. Oh, don't look so shocked." Beverly shook her head slightly in amusement and dropped her arms.

"Sorry, but you don't really seem,"

"Like the dating type I know," Will rolled his eyes, "That's why I need some advice, the closes I've come to a date in a while was when Doctor Lecter invited me over for diner the other night."

"Wow I didn't know you and Lecter had a thing going on." Beverly teased "Sounds kinda scandalous to me. What would Jack think." She chuckled at her own joke, but soon stopped when she noticed Will did not return the chuckle. Beverly would often pride herself on being able to get Will to laugh. It was almost like a badge of honor for her. To get the known

recluse of their friend group to crack a smile or even join in on the banter; most people didn't believe Will had the capability to do anything other than act like the weight of the world was on his shoulders.

"No, no it's not like that and you know it." Will could feel himself becoming ruffled as he began to doubt asking for help in the first place, but Beverly was one of the few people he called a friend, she was also the only few he knew who wouldn't hold back on the truth with him. She didn't treat him as fragile, as someone that needed to be tip toed around and he found that refreshing. Plus, he really needed a woman's impute on what he should do.

Beverly placed her hand on his arm and lightly rubbed it; an act of reassurance, knocking Will out of his soon to be downhill spiral. "I'm just teasing you," She smiled while he refocused himself on her, "I'm actually happy for you. Must be hard to get out there, especially with this line of work, trust me I would know. Hell, Zeller's been complaining about how he's been striking out for the past four months. When he finds out that you managed to get a date before he could." Beverly smirked and Will gave her a crooked smile. "There ya go, now what do you need to know?"

Will stood outside the small art gallery, the location borne the name Birds Nest. The meaning to the name made sense to him, the place held local pieces and if someone wanted to have their art be seen outside the city, they'd have to literally leave the nest to do so. To find the gallery took him a few google searches. He wanted to make sure the address matched what Miranda had told him, most people would call it acting paranoid, Will called it acting cautious. When Miranda told him that it was small, she wasn't joking; the place couldn't be any larger than the local pizza joint in Wolf Trap that Will would sometime frequent when he was too tired to actually make himself something to eat at home. The gallery was a small block of a building that sat sandwiched between two clothing stores, it blended right in with its light grey brick exterior, dark blue canopy, and frosted windows.

He checked his watch to make sure he hadn't shown up too early for their *date*; the idea that he was actually going on a date still felt unreal for him. It wasn't like he never been on one before, he actually had somewhat of a social life when he was younger; hell, he had a few partners as well. But that was when his *gift* was still considered a blessing and not an infected thorn in his side that his body had developed antibodies around. As he grew older and had been bitten more times than he liked to count, the appeal to actually date started to fade along with the need to socialize. It was far too easy for him to just close himself off to others, it was less exhausting for Will than to try and play a part that was worn down over time. His watch read seven twenty-five, he was only five minutes early. Beverly gave him the advice to show up only a few minutes early, that way he didn't have room to chicken out while he stood there waiting. It also showed how punctual he could be when it came to plans. Will lowered his wrist and placed his hands in his pockets, he could feel the anxiety began to scratch under his skin. *Not good.* He thought to himself as he shifted from one foot to the other.

"Will." Will turned to the sound of a familiar velvet voice and caught Miranda just a few feet away, she looked beautiful. Her long hair was gathered and placed in an updo style, her make-up was just as lightly applied like day before and she wore a dark possibly royal blue; if he remembered the color right, pea coat styled dress. What she wore made Will feel thankful for asking Beverly for help, especially when it came to what he should wear; that

was where her bluntness shined. After an annoyingly long time digging through Will's closet and a lot of *you can wear something better than that.* The two managed to come together with an outfit that consisted of his brown tweed blazer he often wore during lectures paired with a dark forest green dress shirt; that hadn't seen the light of day since he had to attend a cousins wedding.

"Miranda, you look lovely." Will smiled as he finished the distance between them, the women smiled at the compliment and bowed her head slightly. Something told Will that she probably heard that compliment all the time.

"Why thank you and I must say you look quit dashing yourself." She returned the compliment with a smile and unlike her Will was not use to getting compliments; he had to stop his brain from collapsing in on itself from the anomaly. The closes thing to compliments he had ever encountered was always the back handed kind, or the you gave me one so I must now give you one even though there isn't really anything to work with kind. To actually receive something that didn't fall on those lines, sent a light warmth through his chest. The two stood still for a few seconds, both with soft smiles on their faces. "Let's head inside shall we." Miranda offered.

"Let's." Will extended his arm for her. *It might have been a while, but I still know how to act like a gentleman in some situations.* He thought to himself, Miranda's smile brightened as she placed her hand into the crook of his elbow. *Okay, I can do this.* Will reassured himself before the two moved to enter building.

"Hold on I have to get my phone out," Miranda stopped and pulled out her phone from a different smaller purse than the one she had the other day. Her left hand never let go of his elbow. "I forgot to mention, that you have to pay to get in, even though it's full of local artists." Will wasn't sure if he was ment to hear the last part of that sentence, her tone was close to a mumble and pointed more towards her purse than towards him. He just chose to not respond. "I preordered the tickets last night, I guess I was anticipating this evening." She smiled with a playfully bounce of shoulders.

"I didn't know, I'll pay for my share." Will stated a bit frazzle from embarrassment, *I should have looked more closely into this place other than where it was. Then I'd be paying for our tickets instead of her. Some gentleman.* He thought almost bitterly to himself.

Miranda playfully slapped his arm with her free hand and laughed lightly. "Don't worry about it, I should have said something," Miranda began to move towards the entrance with Will now following her lead. "Plus, it was my idea to come here if I recall." Will wanted to refuse and insist that he should pay her back, but he thought back to the coffee shop and what he profiled off of her. He knew if he tried, he'd just end up talking to a wall. Instead, he strode over, out of her hold and made the gesture of opening the door for her. Miranda looked merrily taken back. "Why thank you Will." She cooed as she touched his arm before she walked through the door, Will bowed his head slightly as a welcome before he followed her inside. Once inside Miranda had been the one to reinitiate the arm hold when they entered.

The art gallery was nothing to write home about in his opinion, the place seemed to run on the stereotypical art gallery flare. White walls; to help bring out the art, with paintings of

different sizes and styles hung proudly on them, grey linoleum floors that made his and most likely everyone else's shoes squeak and the never-ending sound of orchestra music. That constantly changed from well-known pieces to something that he'd probably never heard of if it wasn't for this night. The two slowly made their way around the surprisingly large area, Will was sure the outside would match the inside in size.

"Look at this painting." Miranda spoke as she began to guide Will towards one of the larger paintings that hung lonesome on one of the far-off walls. The painting was primarily made of rusted colors, there were sharp strokes of deep reds that laid under just as deep oranges. As if the two colors were trying to pin one another down on the canvas. Now and again a fat harsh green would separate the colors along with sprinkles of yellow. Giving the eyes something to refocus on as the brain tried to understand what the artist was trying to convey in the heat of inspirational passion. "I know this will sound cliché, but what do you see when you look at this painting?" Miranda asked not turning away from the art piece.

Will stared at the canvas, one of the art styles he hated was abstract and this painting leaked it like a broken faucet. He relied heavily on his over active; and that was him using the term lightly, imagination. The problem with his imagination was it needed something to latch onto and sink its teeth in. With abstract art his imagination ran far too wild, it was a feral animal that he often kept under lock and key in his mind. But when he would open the door and let it run, his imagination would take the chance and gorge itself until it could no longer walk. A starved beast that smelled blood for the first time in weeks.

"I see chaos." Will answered his voice was an octave lower than he liked it to be. That's what he seen when he bore his eyes into the painting. The aggressive collision of colors that seemed to scramble to be the dominate focus brought an unwanted link to the way his mind felt on most days and if he focused more on his inner self, he might even feel it as well. *Nothing but chaos lays on this canvas.* He thought to himself. Miranda tilted her head slightly to the side and pursed her lips, Will could hear a faint hum as she weighed his answer.

"See I was going to say a forest in the fall," Miranda softly giggled and squeezed his arm, "but I like your answer far better than mine. Sounds more creative." She smiled before she began to move away, Will was thankful that Miranda hadn't asked him to elaborate. He didn't know how he'd be able to explain what he had ment and he felt a small sting of fear on the possibility of what an answer could have led to. He had to remind himself at that point that he wasn't in the company of other profilers or psychiatrists, who often made it part of their day to analyze every single thing that came out of his mouth. It felt like a breath of fresh air.

The evening was spent with them slowly walking around the handful of art pieces, now and again they would stop to take in a painting or a statue. Miranda would speak her opinion on a piece and Will noticed how she never held anything back when it came to her thoughts. Whether it was how she praised a piece for the way it conveyed its meaning in a subtle way or the lack of appeal she felt towards a statue that in her thoughts could have been executed better than what was standing in front of them. The more they walked together the more he grew to like what she had to say, she had a bluntness to her. Miranda wasn't shy to speak her thoughts and Will found that attractive. Once in a while he would give his own interpterion on an artist work and Miranda would praise him for his creative way of thinking and how it would have her rethink about the work they stood in front of them.

“Well, that was nice and all, but one can only take looking at paintings of the forests and photographs of skylines for so long.” Miranda stated as they walked over to the exit, the women had a point. Will noticed almost as soon as they walked in that the place held a lack a verity when it came to the works it displayed for the public. The number of paintings that surrounded the theme of nature was equal to the number of pictures of tall towering buildings that were found in Baltimore. The more they walked the more the works blurred together and Will wasn’t sure if he was looking at something new or if they had just accidently walked over to the same piece or not.

“I know what you mean and can we talk about that one ridiculously large photo of an egg. Nothing else just an egg.” Will added as he held the door for her once more.

“Oh, but don’t you understand Will,” Miranda turned to stand in front of him clasping her hands together dramatically, “it’s supposed to represent our fragile state as a society.” She mocked with a posh voice and a flare of her hands. Will couldn’t help, but chuckle at the act.

“Yeah, and how is that?” Will playfully challenged as he placed his hands on his hips, Miranda stood in front of him for a moment and he rose a singular eyebrow. “You have nothing else to say do you?” He lightly laughed and Miranda for the second time that night slapped his arms.

“Sorry not all of us can give out creative meanings to pieces of art.” She giggled before she wrapped her arm around Will’s. He glanced down towards the entwine limbs, even though they were like that throughout all their time in the galley, she still came back to holding onto his arm. He was used to the light touches that came and went in his life, there was often a reason for the touch that laid between reassurance and light friendliness. He had trained himself to stop flinching away from the touches and how to accept the coldness that they left behind. What he wasn’t use to was a touch that stayed longer and often came back without any other reason than just to make contact with him.

“If I remember correctly from our phone call the other day you said you wanted to get something to eat after this.” She tilted her head, leaned closer to his side and batted her eyes, Will’s mind went blank for a second, as he was lost in the warmth her body gave off and how soft she felt pressed against him. Will quickly tried to remember the phone call.

“Uh yeah there’s this Italian place just around the corner from here that a friend from work told me about.” He managed to get out as he stiffly pointed to the direction of the place. “If you feel like having Italian that is, I don’t want you to eat something you don’t feel like having.” He added. Sure, there was a reservation under his name, but he didn’t want to push Miranda into something she didn’t want to do.

“That sounds nice, I haven’t had a good Italian dinner in while.” She smiled as she let Will walk her towards the location.

Strelitzia, that was the name of the restaurant Beverly had told him about when he showed her the location his date would be taken place.

“You’re in luck Will, I know this Italian joint just around the corner. A friend of mine; he’s the manager, works there. It’s for sure the place you’d want to take her, I’ll give him a call

and he can get you a real nice table." Will had thanked her numerous amounts of times and Beverly took each and every one of them. She just asked for him to spill every juicy detail after words to her first in return. If that was price he needed to pay for the huge favor, he'd be more than willing.

The restaurant held a modern rustic look that still had a high class feel imprinted into it. With mix matching pattern wooden walls and golden metal beams framing the building. There was a stylish black metal gate that cut off the those who passed by from those who chose to sit at the dining patio. Tea lights delicately hung around the building, showing off the elegant yet still welcoming experience one would have if they chose to dine with them for the night.

"Um hello," Will caught the attention of the receptionist; a young man wearing the standard off the rack white shirt with a black vest and bowtie to match. The young man looked up from the podium and gave Will the fake welcoming smile that came with the job description.

"Hello sir and ma'am, how may I help you two this evening?"

"A friend of mine called earlier today, there should be a reservation for a Will Graham." Will answered as he strained to be heard over the clanking of dishes and the conversation of others. He watched as the young man ran his fingers down the scheduling book and tutted his last name. A miniscule of cold dread spiked at the bottom of his spine, when the intrusive thought of what if Beverly never made the call or he had gotten the restaurant mixed up emerged in the back of his head. *That would be my luck wouldn't it, make it through the first half of this date just to fuck it up on the part I had suggested.*

"Aha here we are sir, a table for two for a Professor Graham." The young man smiled as he walked out from behind the podium. Will was a bit taken back at the usage of the title professor instead of the standard mister, but then he remembered who had made the reservation for him. "Right this way sir." The young man gestured openly with one hand towards the dining room and began to walk towards their destination.

I'm going to kill Beverly after this. Will thought to himself as his title played through his head. He could picture Beverly just smirking while she placed his name for the table. Will could place the act as her trying to help him impress his date, or just more likely as a small joke to play. A way to poke at him from a distance and he'd have no choice, but to take it.

"*Professor* Graham huh." Miranda's voice had rich undertone of intrigue mixed with something else that Will couldn't place right away, but the way her grip on his arm had tighten only slightly. An amount of pressure that had sent an elate tingle though his arm, had him rethinking his murder attempt. They followed the receptionist through the semi crowded dining area, around the strategically placed round tables with red table clothes; that made the area feel less crowded than what it really was, almost bumping into more than one waiter and having to maneuver themselves so a woman who couldn't wait to scoot back her chair could get up. The whole ordeal had Will rethinking his rethink on not murdering Beverly.

"Here is your table." The receptionist said as he showed off where they'd be dining for the night, the table was larger than the ones they had woven in and out of. It sat proudly by a large window that had the flowers birds of paradises etched into it. The window gave view to the busy street without the clutter of the dining patio to deter those who gazed through it. A

dark red table cloth was draped over it, that gave the furniture the allusion of similarity to the smaller versions of itself that were scattered around. But it still held the feeling of superiority that came with the location and size. They both said their thanks when the young man put down their menus and informed them that their waiter would be over right away. Leaving them for the rest of the night.

“Here let me get that for you.” Will offered as he made his way around Miranda and pulled out one of the dark oak chairs for her. Miranda placed a hand on her chest married with a flattered look as she went to take the offering seat.

“Why thank you,” Miranda admired while she sat down and let Will help her scoot in her chair, she watched as Will quickly made his way around her and to his seat. “Such a gentlemen thing to do.”

“I try.” Will replied with a tight smile as he sat down in front of her.

“Well, it’s very appreciated.” Miranda smiled, Will licked his lips and opened his mouth to reply, but was interrupted by their waitress; dressed in the same style as the receptionist, but with a red vest and bow tie. With a played down version of the mandatory smile. She gave the standard greeting and asked them what they wanted to drink. Will fumbled for a second, he hadn’t expected the service to be so quick and he hadn’t had the chance to look at his menu. But Miranda had taken charge and ordered for him and herself. As she told the waitress that they’d love to share a bottle of Zinfandel, she then turned to him and told him it was a nice wine to par with almost any Italian dish; the waitress had agreed, and left to retrieve a bottle.

If he recalled right Lecter might had made the same comment once to him, how it was a nice wine to have with a more meat-based styled dish. Will never knew how a conversation led to the topic of wines, maybe they we’re sharing a glass during one late night, or it could have been during the time where Will was trying to convince the man that he actually knew a thing or two about cooking. By listing dishes, he had made throughout his life that didn’t involve just opening a can of pre made stew or popping a tv diner in the microwave. That he actually went out to a grocery store and bought actual ingredients.

Will was knocked out of his thoughts, when the waitress came back with the bottle and poured them a healthy amount, before leaving them to go over the menu. Will watched as the waitress walked away before his attention retuned to Miranda. She crossed her arms on the table and leaned forward towards him, her lips pulled up into an artful smile. “So, you go by Professor Graham,” She purred and Will felt his heart nearly launch itself into his throat. “Care to tell me more about it. I am simply curious now.” She intertwined her hands and placed them right under her chin. Answering this question was like staring at a fork in the road for Will. It could either alight a meaningful conversation between the two, or lead to unbearable awkward silence as they tried to carry on through the dinner. Neither one wanting to upset the other with leaving early.

“I’m a professor at the, uh, FBI academy.” Miranda’s face lit up with interest; it looked like he chose the right path to take. “I teach new recruits about the ins and outs of the minds of criminals,” He chose the word criminals deliberately, he wasn’t lying, he was being vague on the topic he teaches. The last thing he wanted to do was bring up the topic of murder. That

topic already haunted him, he didn't need it to haunt Miranda. "How they can take that knowledge into the field and dissect the scene they'll encounter. How they can look beyond the evidence." Will spoke the last part as he turned his attention towards the street.

"That's very interesting, so you basically help shape the future of the FBI." She said and Will returned his gaze back to her and he felt a soft smile form on his face. He had heard that term of shaping the future numerus amounts of times. Anyone who chose to pursue their career as a teacher of any kind always did. It was similar to when someone made the joke to the cashier on how their purchase must be free when they can't ring up the item right the first time. Like the cashiers Will would just strain a smile and nod his head, but hearing it from Miranda made the saying feel more intimate.

"I guess you can say that, but sometimes it feels like you're just speaking to empty seats," Will took a sip from his wine. The flavor remined him of jam thanks to the sweet fruity hints of what he could describe as cherries and blackberries along with others that laid just under the surface. He blamed Lecter for his new found appreciation for the elegant drink. He was happy with calling himself a whisky man, but the eccentric doctor had widened his pallet over the time they knew each other. The wine easily coated his throat; that he hadn't realized felt scratchier than before. "I can just tell sometimes that they are there because it's mandatory and what I'm saying is going in one ear and other the other." He tried to hide the bitterness that threatened to reveal his true emotions. "Their grades prove my point." He added for humor, which worked in his favor. "You know what I do to pay the bills, how about you. What keeps the lights on at your place?" Will asked more than happy to change the attention away from himself.

Miranda prodded the inside of her cheek with her tongue. "I run my own fashion company," she ran her finger over the rim of her wineglass, "I mostly design and produce men's fashion. I don't know if you ever heard of the brand, but it's called Scarlet Swan Fashion." Miranda turned her eyes towards Will; it was clear what reaction she was looking for. Will wasn't caught off guard by the answer, he could tell that she must have been in charge of something, by the way she carried herself, the mentioning of an assistant and by the other clues he had picked up earlier. What he hadn't expected was Miranda to be the founder of such a well-known brand.

"That's interesting, I think I might own a tie from your brand." Will took another sip from his wine. Miranda stared at him blankly; if she was expecting more of a reaction from him, she'd be sadly mistaken. Miranda then dropped her head heavily and shook it lightly. *Oh, crap you fucked it up now Graham.* Will lowered his glass and loosely looked back and forth, before turning back to Miranda. "Uhm, I'm sorry I didn't mean to offend you or anything like that," Will tentatively reached over and carefully placed his hand on hers, "It's just hard for me to I guess read the room you can say." The sound of laughter made his mind freeze as Miranda raised her head to reveal a smile that reached all the way to her eyes.

"No, it's nothing like that," She laughed as she placed her other hand on top of Will's, trapping his hand between hers; engulfing it in that soft warmth that he had oddly craved back at the coffee shop. "I'm just so used to the standard gawking that comes when I mention my occupation, or god forbid they don't believe me and bury themselves in denial,"

She patted Will's hand as her smile calmed down. "How you reacted was so much more refreshing than I expected." Miranda lifted her hand and Will soon followed.

"I guess I'm glad I was able to react to your liking." Will pondered the sentence that just came out of his mouth. It didn't feel right for some reason. "Something tells me you don't like to share what you do for a livening; I don't like too either." He said as he tried to unstick himself from thinking too long on his previous sentence.

Miranda clicked her tongue and turned her attention towards the window. "Not really, as soon as the men I date find out what it is I do, they just jump at the chance to work the relationship into their favor," Will watched her expression shift, he could feel the hurt from past relationships slowly flow off of her. How he had known that feeling, someone only getting close just because they wanted to take advantage. To only to be seen for one aspect of yourself and not you as whole. "It's just so tiring sometimes." Once more Will found himself; this time with more assurance, reaching over and placing his hand on top of hers, Miranda turned away from the window, her mouth slightly opened and her eyes a bit wide.

"I know what you mean. Trust me I've been in the same boat also, far too many times then I like to count." Will's eyes flickered away from her and towards the table. "Some people only care about what can make them happy in a relationship, they find that one aspect that suits their needs and latch on to it. Not carrying about what the other wants." He let out a deep breath. "Hence why it took a pretty big shove for me to get the courage to actually call and ask you out." Will looked back up at Miranda and he noticed a faintest outline of a smile being formed. "Guess the phrase once bitten twice as shy applies to the both of us." He softly chuckled.

"I guess you're right in that," Miranda turned her hand, so she could take hold of Will's, "It's actually nice to know I'm not the only one on board this boat of crappy dating experiences." She laughed while she rubbed her thumb over his.

"That was a very pleasant dinner," Will and Miranda walked down the seemingly empty side walk, Miranda had her hands entangled into Will's arm. Her body pressed close as they shared the space. "You friend has superb taste." Miranda said as they turned the corner.

"I'll have to thank her later." Will huffed a laugh, *Beverly you get to live another day.* They turned to where Miranda had mentioned parking her car.

"You know you didn't have to pay for the whole meal." Miranda mused.

"Yes, I did, you paid for the gallery, the least I could do was pay for dinner." Will insisted.

"Okay you've got a point, but you are also walking me to my car, we could have just said our goodbyes at the restaurant. Why is that?"

"Because it wouldn't be very gentlemanly of me to let you walk back to your car all by yourself." Will joked. "Plus, this way we can spend a few more minutes together." He added with a charm filled smile.

"That was ridiculously cheesy you know that." Miranda giggled.

“And you asking me how a painting made me feel wasn’t?” Will lightly shot back which earned him a light shove.

“If my memory serves me right, I was asking you, what did you see not how you felt,” Miranda countered, “oh, here’s my car.” Will looked over to where Miranda had pointed and once gain wasn’t surprised. There waiting for its owner sat a very well taken care of Rolls Royce with silver paint and a dark red trim, that held just the right amount of glitter flack to help the already eye-catching car stand out. It only made sense to the profiler that someone like her would own a top-of-the-line luxury car. “Guess this is where we say our goodbyes.” Miranda said softly with a hint of disappointment, as she let go of Will’s arm and walked over to her car, pulling out her keys from her purse.

“I guess so,” Will had followed her to the car, “I had a real nice time with you.” He added voice just as soft as he rubbed the back of his head, he was never good at goodbyes. He was used to just turning and leaving the situations when he was done; what others thought he could care less. He didn’t really know what to do when it was the complete opposite.

“I did too, hopefully this isn’t the last time we actually see each other though.” Miranda said as she turned away from her car. “We can always do something together again.” She stepped away from her car and closer to Will. “I don’t really have anything going on this up and coming Saturday,” The two were merely a few inches apart, Will found himself lost in her eyes; something he hated doing he was now falling victim to and finding out how much he didn’t hate it. “And I still find you very interesting.” Her voice rich like honey was just an octave above a whisper.

Will could feel his heart rattling wildly against his rib cage. His mind was a battle zone on what he should do. It was clearly obvious what the set up was, but then again, he had a hard time deciphering situations like this. Will wasn’t ready for the outcomes, if he kissed her, she might reject him, push him away and he’d once again be bitten. But if he didn’t then she’d be the one to feel rejected and he would hate himself for making her feel that way. His mind was in utter chaos.

It all shut off in a split second, when he felt a delicate hand place itself on the side of his face and guided him forwards. Until his lips made faint contact with hers and his mind went blank. No what ifs ran through his mind, he was lost in the blissfulness of the kiss. The softness of her lips, the warmth from her body and the way her head tilted just the right way. Will closed his eyes and gently leaned into the contact, turning his head at the right angle and letting his body lean into hers. It had been a while since Will had kissed someone; he had forgotten how nice it felt. To feel so close, to feel the flutter of a heart beat; whether it was his of hers, as their bodies held close together. To just focus on the other person who you were sharing a breath with, it felt so good. His arms came to wrap around her waist, while hers loosely folded over his neck.

The warmth that had formed into Will’s chest earlier that night had finally bloomed and spread its petals throughout his body in soft waves. Fluttering under his skin and chasing away any other forms of emotions that dared to extinguish its plumage. They didn’t push each other into committing to anything else, other than to the gentleness that their lips shared. It wasn’t that kind of kiss for them. This was something that was born from a romantic night

out, filled with laughter and pure enjoyment with one another's company. It was delicate, with warmth that would be felt for the rest of the night and it would follow them into their dreams. It was a promise of another time together.

Seven thirty, for some reason most social obligations seemed to hover around that time for Will. From having to help investigate a murder, to a first date with an attractive woman; who to Will's surprise wanted to spend even more time with him, now to waiting patiently for his not psychiatrist to open the door. It was a weird coincident, the more he thought about it. How everything just lined with that time frame being either early in the morning or the brisk of night, his life for the week had circled around it. Will glanced down at his watch to check the time, he always had the habit of showing up a few minutes early for his sessions with Doctor Lecter. Even back when his first and mandatory appointment was made; the one he never wanted to attend, Will had still showed up early. It wasn't to show punctuality, it was simple politeness on his part. He could have come in just on the nose maybe even a little late; by five minutes, but he hadn't.

Will took a seat at one of the reasonably comfortable chairs in the far corner of the waiting room and leaned back just enough for his head to rest on the wall, his hands in his jacket pockets and he dared to let his eyes close. The week seemed to linger on, but it always felt that way when he had to solve a murder. The way it would just eat at his thoughts and grow and grow to make sure there was no room for anything else, the murder had to be the center of attention. It drained him dry. If it wasn't for his date with Miranda; that had broken the cycle that dared to form, he would be far more mentally exhausted than he actually was. He curved the corner of his lips up, when his thoughts took a turn off of the jagged road that the murders paved and onto something smoother. Memories of the other night began to stream though his mind like a gentle creak. He didn't have to apply all of his mental skills, the memories still held fresh for him. The sound of their mixed laughter played in the back of his head, he could still envision the way Miranda held onto his arm as they walked through the art gallery and then there was the kiss. He could still feel the phantom soft touch of her lips on his and how the warmth still lingered in his chest. It dared to blossom on him once more just by the memory alone.

"Kissing on the first date, that's so scandalous Will." Beverly teased while he repaid her favor earlier that day after she had texted him to meet up and, in her words, "Spill everything that went down man."

"Just so you know she was the one to kiss me first." Will had jokingly shot back.

"Oh, so she's the kind of woman to take charge. See something she likes and snatches it." Beverly devilishly smirked and Will felt his face become flush as if he was a teenager having the conversation.

"I question why I tell you anything." Will groaned.

"Because I'm like basically your best friend." She chuckled and Will did not disagree with the self-proclaimed title of being his best friend. Because he knew deep down out of his small group of people, he often dealt with in his life, he held Beverly above the rest.

"You got me there." He said before he went on to talk more about his date to her.

The sound of the door opening brought Will out of his head as he quickly sat up in his seat, he didn't want to give any implication that he felt comfortable enough in the waiting area to have fallen asleep. It took a minuet for his eyes to focus, but it was easy for him to recognize the unmistakable silhouette of one Hannibal Lecter standing in the door way.

"Good evening Will," Hannibal leaned his upper body forward into the room his lips displayed a tight closed smile, "please do come in." he finished as he leaned back, Will never did understand why the other man had to make every little thing seem like a performance of his natural charm; especially for him.

"Evening Doctor." Will returned the greeting as he walked past the other into the large sleek office. Though he was told to make himself comfortable numerous amounts of times, he could never get himself to fall into the offer. It was the same reason he had a hard time calling Hannibal anything other than Doctor Lecter, of course there would be times he'd drop the doctor part, but that was how far he could go when addressing the other. Will never found himself being that comfortable.

"Please have a seat or if you choose to stand, you're more than welcome," Hannibal closed the door and walked into the office, "whatever makes you feel *comfortable*." The way the last word rolled off the man's tongue made a shiver run up Will's spine, it was like the other man was in his thoughts already and all he had to go off on was a greeting. Instead of replying with his own words Will just sat down at his usual spot, the black leather chair felt more comfortable than the one in the waiting room. Somedays for Will it had the opposite effect, but this wasn't one of those days. He knew the trick behind the options that Hannibal had given him. If he stood it would show how uneased or agitative he was, if he sat it would show that he was going to be a bit more open for discussions. Will didn't catch the way Hannibal's lips twitched upwards as he watched the younger man take a seat.

"How's this week treating you thus far Will," Hannibal took his seat across from Will; in a much more polished fashion, "I heard that Jack has you on yet another case."

Will nodded his head. "A cop thought it was another Ripper incident." Hannibal subtly tilted his head. The idea that someone might be out there trying to claim his title played through his mind, along with how he would execute ending the life of this false messiah.

"And was it?" He already knew the answer, but he wanted to see Will's reaction to the; he must admit, ridiculous question. The other just tiredly shook his head and he poked the inside of cheek with his tongue.

"Not even close," He scoffed. "The cop just saw the missing body parts and jumped the gun," he let out a hollowed laugh, "this killer wasn't even trying to be a copycat," Hannibal felt something shift under his skin, he wouldn't call it relief but something akin to the emotion. He did detest others who tried to claim the works of an artist, such as himself. "She has something else entirely in mind."

"You believe the killer is a woman," Hannibal folded one leg over the other, placing his closed hands on top of one knee. "Although not uncommon female serial killers are a regarded as being more unlikely. What makes you so certain?"

“There’s this underlining intimacy that can only be replicated by a woman,” Will licked his lips, “along with how she executing these kills. Among other reasons it just all points to the killer being a woman.” Hannibal easily recalled the last female serial killer case Will had worked on. One Molly Shannon, a woman in desperate need of a family willing to have the ones she claimed to “love” become killers. The case had brought out Will’s paternal side, it made him wonder what this woman might bring out.

“And how is she executing her victims?”

“I don’t think you’d really want to know that, Doctor Lecter.” Will replied as he crossed his arms and turned his attention, so he was no longer looking straight onto the doctor and more around him. Hannibal shifted in his seat, one of his worst qualities; in his own opinion, was his curiosity. It had gotten him in a handful amount of trouble in his youth.

“Come now Will, you must give me more credit than this,” He tilted his head in more playful manner as he placed a smile to match. “Or must I recite all my years in the emergency room along with the cases that you and I have worked together.” He even leaned forward just to emphasize his interest. Will sucked his teeth and Hannibal noted the way he bounced his leg. Hannibal knew how to get what he wanted.

“Alright I’m sorry if I implicated anything,” Will said as he unfolded his arms, “she’s well,” He turned his head away from Hannibal and towards the window, “she’s slicing their throats,”

“That doesn’t seem so horrific as compared to other cases you’ve.”

“After she cuts off their penises,” Will interjected still not looking at the doctor, “she’s also removing their testicles after their death.” Hannibal slowly sat back in his chair with vague look of disturbance, even though the thought wasn’t as unnerving to him as it would be to others. He had done more horrific acts then simple genital mutilation, but he still had to act as if this was something above those. To keep up with appearances to some degree. Will turned his head back and studied Hannibal’s face; he had fallen for the well-placed mask, and agreed with the look.

“My theory is she’s trying to emasculate these men as much as possible.” Will was trying to move the subject further along, away from the execution and towards the why.

“Might you know why?” The other asked and it seemed to Will like he too might be wanting to move along as well. Will ran a hand over his mouth and just shook his head.

“I haven’t figured that part out; my working theory is that she might feel jealousy towards these men. They were both rich and placed high on the social latter without having to lift so much as a finger.” Will’s eyes began to move lightly as if searching for something as his mind began to dissect the case. Hannibal always enjoyed watching the outer process of Will’s mind working. How he craved to be able to gently take Will’s head in his hands and bash it against his hard wood floor. Crack it open, peel back his scalp, pick out the skull fragments, kneel down and watch its beautiful mechanics in action.

“But you don’t truly believe this could be a simple act of jealousy.” Hannibal stated as he tried to ween his mind away from his day dream. Will’s eyes stopped their search and returned to Hannibal.

“Um, no not really. There’s something else there I can feel it just lurking under this one emotion, I just can’t place it.”

“Emotions are very complicated to short; some are more similar to one another while also being completely different. They also have a tendency to feed off each other, fueling the fire sort of away. Could this be the case for this unknown feeling you are up against?” Will shifted so he was more pressed back in the chair and he placed a loose fist against his mouth, his leg began to bounce again.

“Could be,” Will removed his hand from his mouth and let it gesture vaguely in the air, “It makes sense one emotion bringing out the other. I just don’t know what emotion to look for.” Hannibal could easily tell when Will was starting to turn away from one subject. There wasn’t enough information to have his mind feast on and Will wasn’t going to let it gnaw on the carcass of what was left behind.

“Shall we move away from this topic?” Hannibal said giving a false feeling of an option for Will to decide. The other just nodded his head in agreement and Hannibal returned the answer with pleased smile. “Good. Now I also heard that you went on a *date* yesterday evening. Is that correct?”

Chapter End Notes

Did I just end the chapter on a cliff hanger?

Unexpected Development

Chapter Summary

Hannibal isn't fond of the idea that someone could easily slip past Will's barriers, while he is still trying to get past the front gate.

Chapter Notes

I want to thank you all for the lovely comments, I am so glad you guys are enjoying the fic and Miranda as well. It's all very very much appreciated.
Hope you guys enjoy this chapter :)

Will turned his full attention back to Hannibal, bewilderment etched into his features. Every possible idea of a topic that could have come from the other's mouth ceased to exist. "Ho-, wh- ." Will couldn't construct a sentence, that's how off guard he was caught at what could have been seen as an innocent question. Will knew he sounded ridiculous and probably had the look to match. Will quickly gathered himself. "Yes, I did have a date the other night." He finally answered after he tried to calm the emerging nerves that threatened to prickle at his skin. "How did you find out?" He asked with a puzzled look as he felt himself losing the battle with his anxiety.

Hannibal nonchalantly moved the bottom of his suit coat off his lap before he answered. A way to draw out the delicious discomfort from the profiler even more. He knew the emotion would appear when he asked the question and he knew how beautiful it would present itself when the other was caught off guard so efficiently. "Alana called me the other day," Will clicked his tongue, he should have known. The only other person who knew about his outing was Beverly and she openly talked about how she didn't really care for Lecter, it was a no brainer that it wouldn't be her to spill the information to him. To Zeller and Jimmy on the other hand, that she definitely would do. "She was rather enthusiastic that you were stepping out of your comfort zone and had met someone." Will mentally laughed at the image that appeared in his head of Alana laying on her bed, legs absent-mindlessly kicking in the air, twirling a lock of her hair with one finger, all while she was on the phone with Hannibal. Just gushing over the fact that their Will had taken such a large step into becoming socially normal.

"Guess I'm not all that surprised that she would contact you," Will shifted uncomfortably in the seat he once deemed comfortable. "It's not exactly every day that the FBI's social outcast

has a date." Will unamusingly chuckled. "I'm still surprised it happened at all." He added sheepishly.

Of course it happened my dear boy, Hannibal thought, *you are the only one here blind to your own beauty.* "Yet it did happen to you and I must say I'm impressed by such a large leap." Hannibal said, knowing with the right amount of praise he could get Will to loosen up more, he could see the metaphorical gate closing in front of him and with the right words he could place a wedge so it wouldn't close and not open until next session.

"Um thanks." Hannibal gave him a small warm smile; he knew the praise would work, now he just as had to pry the door fully open.

"You're welcome, if you don't mind me prying, how did the evening go?" He asked with enough innocent laced interest to choke a horse.

"It went well," Will licked his drying lips and felt his throat threaten to close. For some reason it felt odd to discuss his dating life with Lecter. It was never a topic that they had touched, with all the time they spent together in the office or occasionally out. Will hated untouched topics, they were untouched for a reason and the reason was mostly because it made him feel uncomfortable. When he felt uncomfortable things tended to go one of two ways, his tongue would grow sharp and he'd lash out, or he'd just lock himself up and everything would come to a dead stop. But he was working on putting an end to either one of those behaviors. "We went to this small art gallery called Birds Nest, where we spent the night imitating art critics," Will softly chuckled at the memory before he looked over towards Hannibal, uncertain if he should really keep going, a part of his mind told him he shouldn't that he was just boring the other. But then another part told him if Lecter wasn't interested then why would he have asked. "And after words we had dinner at this Italian restaurant called Stra- Streli-." Will began to fumble with the name of the restaurant.

"Strelitzia." Hannibal's cool voiced offered

"Yes, that's the place. Thank you, Doctor." Hannibal gave a nonchalant gesture with his hands as a you're welcome.

"I've heard of the place, never been there myself. I was told they have a very pleasant arrange of Italian cuisine."

"Neither have I until last night, Beverly recommended the place to me and I'm kinda glad she did," Will rubbed the underside of his chin. "We had a very um nice time there. I'd think you might like it." Will said, Hannibal nodded his head in acknowledgment. There was little to no chance that he would step foot in the place, unless he had a certain FBI agent with him. Then he might consider giving the restaurant a single chance.

"Do you plan on seeing this person again?" Hannibal easily caught the fugal attempt to change the attention of the topic and he wasn't going to let Will get away with it. Hannibal had to keep the conversation going, he could see the wedge begin to shift out of place and he wasn't done prodding around.

When he first heard the news of this sudden development in Will's life it felt jarring for him. From the number of times, they had spent together Will had never shown interest in other people let alone being interested in having a relationship with someone. It had caught him off guard knowing that someone could easily walk past Will's barriers and work their way inside in such short time. Yet here he had been trying to map away inside for a while. Hannibal needed to know more; praise had the ball rolling now blunt questioning would keep the momentum going. Will blinked a few times in confusion taken back from the question, not quite sure where the obvious bluntness came from, but he chose to ignore it.

"Uh yeah, we're going to see each other this Saturday," Will's voice held a tone of hesitation, for some reason he felt like the conversation was becoming a tad bit too personal for his taste. "We haven't really talked about what we are going to do yet," Will ran his hands over his pant legs. "I'm actually still shocked that the first date happened in the first place, let alone her wanting to see me again." Will turned away from Hannibal. "I mean what so special about me that she'd want to see more of." He didn't phrase the last sentence as a question, more of a statement. Hannibal never cared for the way Will blatantly talked so lowly of himself, it was second nature for the profiler. Brought on by years of being rejected by those society deemed normal, being feed false truths about why he couldn't fit in and how he could change himself so he could finally be accepted. In truth it would never work and Will knew it, but still he would morph himself as much as he could until he'd either fit or he'd break. Either option would cause Will to lose himself.

You poor blind fool, you really are that unaware of yourself and what others see when they gaze upon you. Is that why you have fallen so easily for this woman? She gave you just the right amount of complements, whispered sweet nothings into your ear and you ate it up like one of those strays you collect. It's honestly pathetic my dear Will.

"None the less," Hannibal crossed his leg over the other for the second time, "This woman obviously seen something in you that she found intriguing, something that you clearly don't see in yourself." Will couldn't stop his eyes from rolling at the statement.

"If it's not the fact that I'm basically the FBI's star freak show attraction, I don't know what it could be." Will couldn't stop the venom in his voice, he regretted it as soon as the words slipped through his lips. His tongue was starting to sharpen on him and he hated himself for taking it out on Lecter.

"I apologies if I offended you Will."

"No, no, you didn't say anything wrong." He ran a hand through his hair, fingers dared to catch in his unruly curls. "It's me I took what you had to say the wrong way," Will took a ragged breath, "if anything I should apologize for my reaction. So, sorry." Will said with a quirked smile that Hannibal returned with his own more sophisticated version. The rest of the session's time trickled by, too slow for Will and too fast for Hannibal. He still had questions for the other about the woman he was seeing, but he had pushed his limits when he offered his own version of a complement that had been lost onto the other. Hannibal should have known better; he had mentally kicked himself after Will had once again shot himself another insult. Who would have thought it could be so hard for Will to take a complement and not turn it into a weapon to use on himself.

“I hope you two have wonderful time this Saturday.” Hannibal said as he opened the door for the other man. *And I hope I can draw more information out of you next time, even if I have to use my own bare hands to dislocated that jaw of yours and rip it out myself.*

“Um thanks,” Will said with an uncertain tone, “I hope your weekend goes by nicely as well.” He added with a fidgeting smile. Hannibal softly bowed his head, a gesture of thanks before he watched Will leave his office for the night. Eyes never removing themselves from the man until the lobby door cut off his view after it was closed. Hannibal softly shut his office door as his mind began to go over the options that laid in front of him. Another serial killer raking through the city was intriguing, the body mutilation was beastly, and the reasoning behind it was tempting to seek out. Yet all those reasons to be drawn into the case felt unappealing compared to the idea that Will had taken such a turn in his normal behavior of social isolation and was now lowing his barriers for someone so quickly. Someone other than himself.

He could point the blame towards Alana for the sudden shift in the man’s behavior; she had basically sung her own praise on the phone when she told him how she persuaded Will to make the call in the first place. That was something Alana always sought out to do, help Will pick up social ques and point him in the right direction. She seen Will as a project and how couldn’t she, a man who resembled a kicked puppy with a breath-taking mind, who was in drastic need of a loving hand to help guide him. If Hannibal hadn’t had a tight grip on his own self-control and a plan already laid out, he might have easily fallen for the project as well.

But where Alana wanted to help keep the other together and build him up from there, he wanted to slowly chip a part the blaringly cracked shell and bring something entirely different out. Something that he could only see when he laid his sights on the younger man. It was dark and shifting, like a creature in the forest the lurked behind Will’s house, hardly to be seen and when one would dare lay eyes on it, the entity would turn and run. But for Hannibal, who was able to hold more than a glimpse, the beast did not run. It did not seek shelter from his gaze, the presence just stared back at the man as if it knew what he could provide. It was an essence that needed to be freed, something that only he could do, to nourish and help it grow with his own hands.

All that work laid out so neatly for him, threaten to go to waste. Hannibal hated when things went to waste and that unexpected development had emerged to only cause difficulty for him. It resembled a cancerous growth; it appeared out of nowhere and it was going to spread. To attack the work that had already begun to take place and replace it with its own cells. Hannibal could easily see the action taking place before his very eyes and he felt something begin to stir deep inside.

Miranda and Will easily walked down the bustling street that hosted a decently sized farmers market, it was bigger than what Will was used to. When he thought of farmers markets, he often pictured a few well put together stands on each side of the street. Each one showcasing an array of fruits and vegetables all grown by the providers own soil coated hands. Only to be broken up by those who would offer homemade goods such as jams or something they had baked. The one he was currently walking through could definitely consume the image he had in his head and still feel hungry afterwards. With rows of large white stands that offered

more than just the stereotypical fruit or vegetables. Now and then they'd walked past a street performer; who was either playing an instrument or twisting their body in odd angles that made his own body ach at the sight. A few food stands from places that Will had never heard of would pop up to break up the locally produced options. Twinkled in would be the occasional small business selling homemade décor; that Will was tempted to purchase for his own house, and the mandatory community stalls. That either brought awareness to what was going on behind the scenes or trying to get people to sign up for volunteer work.

"Isn't this nice." Miranda squeezed Will's arm, she had easily taken back her position of entwining their arms together after they had reconnected for their second outing and basically glued herself to his side. The idea that she willing did this as if it was second nature for her still baffled him, along with the fact he never hesitated to accept the contact. Will found that he had started to enjoy her being so close to him, the way she had pressed herself to his side with ease and how good it felt to drop the imaginary ruler so easily. It was different and he liked it.

Will looked at the rows of venders and the crowd that threaten to swallow them whole then over to Miranda. He could feel a buzz of delight radiating off of her and he felt the same buzz slowly seep into himself. He could easily blame his empathy for taking in her emotion and turning it onto himself, but he really didn't want to. He wanted the emotion he was starting to feel, to actually be genuinely his for once.

"Yeah, I guess it is," they slowly walked down the center of the isle of venders, out of reach for the sellers to try and beckon them over, but still close enough for their eyes to easily be caught by the offerings that sat in view. "In all honesty I never bought you as a farmers market kind of person." He lightly chuckled as he recalled Miranda calling him Friday night after work; up to that point they were still swimming around the possibilities on what they could do, explaining how she had gotten word of the farmers market taken place Saturday and how it was going to be the last one of the season. At first Will was uncertain of going, it was the last one of the season easily indicating that it was most likely going to be the busiest the market has ever been besides the first day it was put up. And he was unsure if he could mentally handle the crowd of people walking so close, the loud noises from venders and street bands, and to top it all off there still was the case that weighed heavily in his mind.

When he had agreed to seeing Miranda again the up incoming Saturday, he was still recovering from the warmth of their shared kiss, he would have possibly agreed to anything that night thanks to the soft fuzz that had coated his racing mind. But after a twenty-four hour cool down, the case had reared its ugly head along with the rest of his responsibilities. It put him back into what most would call "the right mindset". Yet, Miranda's voice on the phone was on verge of excitement when she had told him about her find and the way she had begun to list reasons why it would be an enjoyable time for the two them. That warmth was starting to reappear in his chest as he listened to her and it was spreading into his mind and knocking his thoughts out of line. Will found himself easily agreeing to what Miranda wanted to do for their shared Saturday.

"I don't blame you for thinking that way, I mean our first date was to an art gallery that I had recommended," Miranda turned her head to look at a stall selling Tupperware then back to him, "that might have set an impression about me. Along with what I do for a living." She

playfully said. “But I also enjoy a good farmer’s market along with other social events that have people gathering around.” Miranda turned her attention from one stand to the other before she began to lead Will over to a stand selling home sewn bows and other fabrics, “It helps me understand what people are attracted to. To see what catches their eyes.” she said in a much more focused tone, Will watched as Miranda studied the fabric with calculating eyes. Miranda mouthed a thank you to the women who stood patiently behind the booth after a few minutes, before she turned and began to walk away with Will close to her side. “Something I found you can’t see so easily when you just look at numbers on a screen or well put together charts in an office.” She added in a much lighter tone. “But that’s something I enjoy doing, what about you. You didn’t really go into much about your interests over the dinner we shared.”

Will slightly shrugged, “I mean I’m pretty simple when I think about it,” Will could list his interests on one hand and it was a fact about himself he had yet to figure out if he liked or not. “I do enjoy fishing on my off time, but I couldn’t really keep a conversation going off that alone over dinner now could I.” He joked and Miranda gave a soft laugh which helped encourage himself to keep going. “Then there’s my dogs.” Will watched as her eyes lit up at just the mention of the word.

“Oh, you have dogs?”

“Yeah a few actually,” Will knew better then to mention the exact number right away, people tended to frown upon finding out he had seven dogs right off the bat, “I take in strays that I find lost around my house; people tend to dump them near the woods. I guess they believe they’d be able to survive out there on their own, but in reality, the statistics are not in the animal’s favor.” Will could feel the hate for the act build up in himself and he had to refocus his thoughts before he started to go off on a long tangent. About irresponsible people, how if they never wanted a dog then why did they get one in the first place. Along with how could someone be so heartless to show these animals love just to rip it away from them.

“That’s real sweet of you to do,” Miranda’s voice cut through his thoughts like a sharp knife, drawing his attention without any effort, “to take those animals in and give them a second chance at a loving home.” Miranda said with a warm smile. “I don’t really have any time for pets myself, busy working and all that.” Will understood what she ment, he sometimes wondered how he managed to juggle his work life with taking care of his pack. But it was one of those few miracles that he was blessed with when he found the right routine. “The closes I’ve got to owning one is this black and white cat that stalks around outside my house, now and again I’ll place a dish of milk out for it, but that’s how close our relationship is.” She said with a shrug.

“In my honest opinion,” Will turned his attention over to stan offering an assortment of nuts and dried fruits and began to walk over, taking the lead for the first time since they had arrived, “I bet that bowl of milk you put out makes that cat’s day.” He said with a smile.

“Aren’t you such a sweet talker.” She giggled before she went to look at the dried fruits, Will just shrugged as he turned his attention back to the stand. “May I sample these?” Miranda asked as she pointed to a small plastic container full of small dark brown orbs. Will adjusted his glasses, so he could read what the label offered. Dark Chocolate Cranberries.

“Not a problem ma’am,” The man behind the stan said as he reached over the booth and popped open the container, “not a lot of folks care for these little guys, guess they prefer their chocolate to coat something sweeter.” He said as he dropped a few into her up turned hand. “Hope ya enjoy.”

“Thank you.” She said with a polite smile, the man just nodded his head and turned his attention to another costumer. Will watched as Miranda placed one in her mouth and was taken back when she lit up on the spot. “These are really good,” She said with appreciation before she placed one more into her mouth, “I mean the tartness from the berry mixed with the dark chocolate, they just mesh so well. You need to try one.” Miranda held one out between her fingers for Will, who looked at the offering with uncertainty.

“Uh I don’t know; I mean I’m not a big fan of cranberries and-” He was cutoff when Miranda quickly managed to pop one of the chocolate covered fruits into his mouth without warning. Will just looked at her with slightly wide eyes, Miranda just held a mischievous look in return. He blinked a few times to register the act fully. “Did you just put food in my mouth?” Will asked with a playful baffled look on his face.

“Maybe,” She all but sang as she pressed her body close to his, “come on how are you supposed to try new things if you just turn everything that’s different down without a second thought.” He hated that she made a good point.

“You got me there,” Will said with a grin, “just don’t make it a habit alright.” He added in a not so serious stern voice, which Miranda wrinkled her nose at.

“Whatever you say, now just eat it already.” She encouraged with another squeeze of his arm. Will just rolled his eyes and gave into the encouragement, he bit down on the cranberry and understood what Miranda was trying to convey to him. The burst of tartness from the cranberry threatened his taste buds was subdued and put in its place thanks to rich forgiving bitterness that came from the dark chocolate that coated the fruit. Two distinct hostile flavors that instead of bring the worst out of each other seemed to have slowly canceled one another at the right moment. Sharp tartness was covered by just as sharp, but more forgiving bitterness and then there was nothing. Like a light being turned off, leaving one wanting to experience the battle all over again.

Before Will had dreaded the idea of having to swallow the treat out of politeness and then having to try and convey to Miranda that he didn’t hate it, but he wasn’t going to eat anymore. He was relieved when that wasn’t the case and he actually enjoyed the chocolate covered fruit, the idea of even buying himself a bag played at his mind.

“Looks like you might know my own tastebuds better than I do,” He said with a grin and he watched as Miranda’s face lit up once more, “I mean this is like what the third time you introduced me to something new that I ended up enjoying?” He chuckled as they slowly began to turn away from the stand and made their way back to the center of the street. “I must give credit where credit is due.”

“What can I say, I like to introduce people to new things,” Miranda turned and stood in front of Will with sly smile, “Especially when the person is you.” She said in a sultry tone as she slowly leaned forward, her hands placed on his chest and Will could feel how his face

threaten to burn, as the flower in his chest began to slowly unwind and stretch. The two were caught off guard when a familiar catchy jingle began to clash with an older man's guitar melody.

"What now." Miranda huffed as she leaned away and pulled out her cellphone from her jacket pocket, she looked at the id and threw her head back in frustration. She then turned to Will; who held a look of confusion, "It's my assistant again," she answered his unspoken question. "I asked her not to contact me today, but I guess I should have made it clear it was an order." Will sometimes wished he had the authority to do that with Jack. Just to tell the man to forget his number when the weekend came around and only when the sun was high in the sky on Monday to even think about contacting him. The look on the man's face would be priceless. "Yes, Brittney what's the issue this time."

It was going to be a standing session that day, Will stood just to the left side of Hannibal's desk. His back pressed against one of pillers and his head slightly lowered, indicating that it might take a few hard pulls to get the man to open up. But still showing that he was willing to make conversation after. The doctor could pick up the small spike of anxiety that was radiating off the man, but he couldn't place the cause of it. It could be the case, it could be that his date hadn't gone off as well as last time, or it could be something entirely unrelatable to both options. A small part of him hoped it was the date.

"How was your weekend Will," Hannibal began as he lazily moved around the office, hands in his pants pockets. Only stopping at his desk to mindlessly adjust an already straight stack of folders. "Did you and the woman you're seeing figure out what it was you two wanted to do?" He asked casting a glance at the profiler, who was peering up at him through his wavy bangs still not fully lifting his head. Hannibal enjoyed how the angle of Will's head had amplified his already soft round eyes along with the natural innocent look he was gifted with. How he fantasied covering that pretty face in blood and watch it shift and contort. In either horror or desire, he could never decide.

"It went well," Will finally answered as he scratched the back of his head and shifted slightly from one foot to the other. It was clear that he still had a hard time talking about his dating life. Hannibal had to resolve that issue if he was going to get more information. "Miranda and I ended up going to this farmer's market."

Ah so the woman who has managed to slither passed your supposably well-placed defenses goes by the name Miranda. Hannibal weighed the name in his mind as he slowly began to walk around, giving Will a moving target to focus on, to keep the other focused. "Did you two enjoy yourselves?" He asked in a nonchalant manner, learning from his mistakes from their last conversation. If bluntness had led to Will nearly shutting down than perhaps casual interest might keep his tongue loose, play on the two friends just talking aspect. Will leaned away from the piller and started to match Hannibal's movement of taking small strides around the office. *Yes, be a good boy and copy what I am doing. Let those mirrors in your mind guild your movements.*

"Yes, we did, at first I thought maybe I wouldn't with the large crowds and the case hanging over my head," Will stuck his hands in his pockets and Hannibal smiled to himself as the copied behavior went unnoticed by the other. "But once we were out there and started to walk

around well yeah." Will trailed off as he stopped walking and started to stare out the large window.

"You seem to be having trouble conversing with me about this topic, why is that?" Hannibal asked striking at the first lull in the conversation, he wasn't going to be left wondering, not again. Will rubbed the back of his neck and shrugged stiffly.

"I don't really know." That wasn't an answer and Hannibal knew that Will knew it wasn't. He'd have to pry harder, if Will was going to be difficult then he'd have to tighten his grip.

"You and I both know that's an inadequate answer," Hannibal began to walk over to Will, who slightly glanced over his shoulder. "I'm almost insulted that you'd think it would work as one." Will lowered his head. He had to keep pushing, to keep prying, he could see the man slowly begin to cave. "You don't seem to have any trouble talking with Alana about it or Miss. Katz, just myself," Hannibal was getting closer, "Am I not worth this office gossip as one might put it?" Will let out a small sigh.

"It's not that, it's just." Will gestured with his free hand, "God how do I put this," He glanced up at the celling as if a being could bestow upon him the words he sought out, hands on his hips as he desperately searched for an explanation. He lowered his gaze back to the window and dropped his hands, "with all the other topics that go on in my life. The murder cases that I bring through that door along with whatever jacked up phenomenon that is my mind." Will made a gesture towards his head to emphasize his point. "I guess I believe those are far more interesting to listen to. Then whether or not I had a good time with this woman that I'm currently seeing." Will fully looked over his shoulder, "I just don't want to bore you I guess." He said with a half-smile and a simple shrug, Hannibal stopped in his tracks as Will searched for a reaction, a simple indication on what the man was feeling before he turned back to look out the window.

Hannibal licked his lips as he watched Will for a second and thought about his next move, what words he could come up with to help tear down the obstacle that kept Will's mouth shut on the topic. Out of all the reasons for the younger man to have, being reluctant to let him further into his life or just being easily flustered at the idea of talking about something personal. Hannibal never imagined it could have been something as simple as Will not wanting to bore him, it was very considerate and it had thrown him off his track for a split second. *You naïve creature. How could you think so lowly of my interests when it comes to you. Have I've not made it evidential on how I see you. Must I try harder, do you want me to carve out my own eyes and gift them to you. Just so you could know all my attention is on you and you alone.*

"I must assure you Will," He began as he slowly continued to walk over to the man, "that yes what you do and how your mind works is quit intriguing all on their own." The two were standing side by side, "I find you as a whole just as or even more captivating," Will turned his eyes away from the window and towards Hannibal. "And whatever it is we discuss whether that being the latest case or something as mundane as a trip to the grocery store,"

"Oh, so now you believe that I actually go to the grocery store." Hannibal chuckled at the playful jab, glad that Will was starting to loosen, before he continued.

“I’ll always listen with the same amount of interest.” He placed a hand on Will’s shoulder and was pleased when the man didn’t flinch at the touch. “You will never bore me.” Will turned from the window and fully took in Hannibal, his eye searching the man’s face as if trying to decipher if the words that he was given were actually true and not just a ruse. Luckily for the both of them Hannibal actually had ment what he said, sometimes blatant truths could play into sly games.

“Thanks, this might sound stupid,” Will huffed a laugh, “but that actually means a lot for some odd reason.” He said with a weak smile and Hannibal smiled back.

“Somethings don’t need a standard reason,” Hannibal leaned in, “just one that makes sense to you.” He said in a hushed tone, as if someone might hear them, that it was a secret for the two of them alone. Will’s smile grew a little stronger at the reassurance.

“Oh, before I forget,” Will quickly turned away, out of Hannibal’s hold and picked up his jacket that laid forgotten on the chaise. With anyone else Hannibal would detest the act of tossing their belongs so haphazardly around, not caring for the pristine look that he took great pleasure in displaying. The mere image of someone blindly throwing their belongings over his things without his regard sent a small spark of anger through his veins, along with multiple ideas for an up-and-coming dish through his mind. With Will on the other hand, it was the complete opposite. He would never admit it out loud, but he actual found the carless behavior rather enjoyable. The knowledge that Will was starting to feel a little bit comfortable in his office; even if the profiler would never admit to himself, sent waves of dull pleasure through his mind. He just had to work on getting him to actually call him by his name.

Will reached into his jacket pocket and fished something out. “I got this for you while I was at the market,” he said as he pulled out a small cellophane wrap bag and held it out for Hannibal. “They’re dark chocolate covered cranberries.” Hannibal took the bag from him and began to look the small offering over with quizzical eyes and a light up turned smile. The bag had the name of the producer written in rather elegant golden lettering along with a ribbon to match. “I tried some at the market and I actually liked them,” Will could feel himself becoming flustered and it startled him, “thought maybe you might as well.” He finally managed to get out, still trying to understand the emotion that rolled through him without warning. “If you don’t, I’ll totally understand, it was just a shot in the dark and not a lot of people enjoy dark chocolate let alone cranberries.” *God damnit Graham learn to shut up, before you dig yourself so deep that you’ll be shaking hands with the devil himself!*

Hannibal looked over the delicate bag in his hand then up to Will, it was amusing to see the man battling with his own emotions. *So, this was the cause of your anxiety. Giving me a gift had your nerves on edge, the avalanche of negative possibilities of the outcome rain delicious havoc on that beautiful mind of yours. All that stress because you were afraid of what I might think of your gift for me. Oh, Will you know a way to my slow beating heart.*

“Thank you Will, this was very considerate of you to think of me.” Hannibal said as he slowly opened the bag, “I must inform you that I am one of those few who do actually enjoy the taste of both dark chocolate and cranberries and when they are paired together,” Hannibal pulled out two of the orbs and offered one to Will, who took the offering with a nod of

thanks. The doctor watched as the other popped the fruit in his mouth, like one of those pain relievers he often took, before he did the same thing. “They make a very striking duo.”

Green Silk Suit

Chapter Summary

> Hannibal does his own small investigation and he soon finds out that green might not be his color. Meanwhile Will's and Miranda's relationship is progressing quite nicely.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will's hour had managed to slip through Hannibal's grasp and he only made slight headway into figuring out, who the new woman; who dared to set foot into *his* Will's life, was. A name was a start, but he really couldn't do much with a simple name. Who knew how many Mirandas were in Maryland let alone Virginia. A quick google search had told him and the odds were not in his favor. Hannibal could spend the next couple of hours staring at his tablet and try to figure out just by going through each and every woman's Facebook or other social media pages. But that felt too cumbersome for him and he still had to take in the fact that this Miranda might not even have an electronic foot print in the first place. That would be time wasted for him.

He needed more to go off on, a last name would be wonderful. But Hannibal knew he couldn't look a gift horse in the mouth. Not after he had managed to slain the beast that stood in the way of the conversation topic so easily. Hannibal honestly thought it would take more pulling on the other's jaw and more tearing at Will's brain to get him to give the man the knowledge he so hungerly sought after, yet the doctor was caught off guard when Will managed to give him something slightly more. Something he himself hadn't realized he wanted or perhaps even needed. And that was a slight glimpse on how Will was starting to see him and possibly their own relationship.

The metaphorical gate no longer needed a wedge to be held open, but that didn't mean that it was going to be any easier to slip past. Hannibal still had to deal with bringing out more information from Will. To have him openly discuss with him in away without raising suspicion or discomfort. It was going to be a difficult task and he wasn't going to act as if it wasn't. Will had told him the issue and Hannibal managed to douse the strong flames of doubt that plagued the man's mind, unfortunately not fully. There were still glowing embers that threated to reignite the flames and have Will start questioning the words Hannibal had graciously bestowed upon him. Hannibal could not let that happen; he still would need to keep up with the act of friendly intrigue when it came to gathering information. He might even have to seek out outside sources.

Another nightmare, Will had woken with heavy uneven breaths and a heart that threaten to crack his ribcage open. Another vicious attack on his vulnerable sleeping mind had him sitting up in his bed trembling as he tried to desperately catch his racing thoughts, that

screamed far too loudly in his ears. He managed to slow his breathing down after a few large gulps of air that his lungs refused to take in and his heartrate slowly lulled itself back into a much more perforable pace. Will looked across from him and found solace in being able to see his dogs, all asleep in their preferred beds unaware of what their owner just endured. Will let out a shaky laugh when he managed to focus his mind on one of the dogs. Jackson; the second largest of the group, who was sleeping on his back, his legs bent oddly, his head dangling off the bed, and tongue hanging out the side of his mouth. The sight soothed a small part of his mind and helped ease him back from the harsh high that came from jolting awake.

He ran a shaking hand over his face as he tried to wipe away of the tendrils of the nightmare that still lingered in his mind. The scene still played so vividly behind his closed eyes, it had him digging the heels of his hands in them, as if would ease the images that still haunted him. But it did nothing to help, the nightmare still ran through his head like a cursed movie stuck on play.

There he was in the middle of the woods, ground coated with fallen leaves and the light from the moon draped over him. He found himself straddling Eric Salazar, watching with twisted satisfaction as the man's throat gushed hot red liquid, too much to be humanly possible onto the both of them. The blood that pooled onto his chest and dripped onto the forest floor had reflected Will in such a disturbingly beautiful way, all while Eric gasped for breaths that would never reach his lungs and clawed at Will's arms as he held him down. Will closed his eyes and leaned back, he let the liquid that flowed out of the deadly fountain wash over him. It felt like pure bliss, but then there was a shift.

The crisp air had turn sharply cold and something stirred in the back of his mind. It had Will opening his eyes, no longer drowning in bliss and he looked down at the body. He was startled as he witnessed Eric Salazar's face begin to morph, his features began to ripple and slip away. Like the man's face was a body of water and Will had just thrown a pebble into it. Confusion had washed over him as the identity of Eric slowly slipped away and someone else had started to replace the man's features. Will leaned closer to the face as he tried to make out the identity of the person being born in Eric's place. As the face slowly filled itself out, there was one thing Will could clearly make out. The one aspect of the new being that laid under him that could help him figure out who they were slowly became clear. A pair of eyes, eyes that at one point Will had stared into out of agitation and spite, a pair that when the light would hit just right would shine a dangerous shade of maroon. The familiar pair of eyes stared back at him with a look of utter betrayal and it had him jolting awake only a few seconds later when more features started to become clear to him.

Will turned to the digital clock that sat on his nightstand and barely made out the blurry light blue numbers. *Eight thirty, huh managed to get an extra hour in*. He thought before he slowly slumped out of bed and made his way to his bathroom, praying that a hot shower could wash away whatever was left from his nightmare. He exited thirty minutes later; a part of him wished he could spend his whole day under the hot running water, and was greeted with the sight of his pack, who had left their own bed in favor of his. Will chuckled, "Go ahead guys," he smirked as he walked over to his nightstand to grab his phone, not missing when one of the dog's tails wagged, "it's not like I was going back to be anyway." He said as scratched the dog's head before going to the kitchen to fix himself a cup of coffee.

He leaned on his counter with a mug in one hand, his other arm wrapped loosely around his chest, and took a deep breath. The shower helped erase the lingering memories of the gruesome scene off of him, to the point where it was no longer as vivid when he closed his eyes and looked more like a muddy puddle. The sudden nightmare had refocused his mind back to the case. One of the few things he didn't want to do was to think about murder early in the morning, he should be thinking about anything else, like preparing breakfast for his dogs, or if he should get started on grading the last batch of assignments before his next class. Not about wealthy assholes being mutilated in cheap motels. But that was a part of his life now, ever since Jack walked into his classrooms those months back asking to use his imagination.

The team really wasn't getting anywhere anytime soon when it came to solving the crimes. The culprit had made sure to leave the crime scene spotless. Any possible trace she could have been left behind wasn't to be found. She had taken the weapon, the used condoms, along with the men's genitals, and she even cleaned out the shower drain of any hair that could have been left when she washed off the blood. The discovery had shocked Jimmy; who thought they might be able to catch her quickly when they dug up a hair, his face practically deflated when he removed the shower drain and found it spotless. It was as if she was never in the room in the first place. Whoever this woman was, she knew how to clean up after herself. It also proved to them how smart she might be and nothing was more dangerous than a smart killer. They'd have to wait for the killer to slip up, but that was a dangerous game, a game where human lives were at stake. They could focus on the first crime scene; the first time was always the sloppiest. But it wasn't going to be easy, it had been over a month since the kill took place and all the evidence was already starting to decompose and any eyewitnesses were not very reliable.

He took a sip from his coffee and found himself missing the strong bite of bitterness that came from the brew that Miranda had introduced him to. He'd have to look for something darker the next time he was out. Will began to wonder what next steps that could be taken what insight he could offer; he was just as lost as the rest of them. *Could focus on the victims past sexual escapades, see if this woman had a history with them. She could be a vengeful lover who was left out in the cold when these men had moved on to the next woman who came across their paths. That would account for the words carved into the wall, names they had screamed at her during an argument.* Will thought as took another sip, confirming to himself that he would definitely switch his coffee. *That could also back up the jealousy theory. You seeing these men with other women had you questioning yourself, what made them so special, what did they have that you didn't.* Will knew he'd have to tell Jack about his latest theory of a suspect and they'd have to look at the victims' list of past lovers, that was also going to be difficult. If Salazar could cover up a tiger attack in only a couple of days, what else could these men cover up with the right amount of money.

Will was dragged out his thoughts when his phone went off, screen lighting up and vibrating on the counter. *Okay Jack if that's you then that is really spooky.* He thought as he reached over to check and was pleasantly surprised to see Miranda's name pop up on the screen.

'Good morning, listen I know it's early…'

Will didn't hesitate to quickly text her back, with anyone else he'd let the idea of letting their text go unanswered for a few minutes play in his mind. He would contemplate if he really wanted to start up a back and forth with someone. Not with Miranda though, Will found himself not even considering giving the act the time of day.

'It's no big deal was already up'

'Guess we're both early birds hahaha'

'You have no idea, anyway what's up?'

'Well I just thought of something we can do during your day off ;)'

"You know when you said you had an idea on what we could do with my day off I didn't think this." Will said as he and Miranda stood in front of a tall two-story building, that sat located right outside the reach of the hustle and bustle of the city. The building had slick black fiber cement walls, that were broken up with panels of red. With large rectangular tented windows and there above the two glass doors was a very minimalistic outline of a scarlet swan. With its neck loosely bent down and its wings elegantly fluttered out and pointed upwards to the sky. Will questioned how many times he might have driven passed the building going to work. As he looked at the displays in the window that sat on the both sides of the door. On the left was two faceless mannequins dressed in well-tailored three-piece suits. One was a dark rich brown with what Will would call a muster yellow tie and the other wore a light blue suit with a floral design lacking a tie. On the right two mannequins wore something more to his taste, one had a simple dark green turtleneck sweater with a pair of sanded jeans and its partner wore a speckled grey collared pull over with a pair of tan pants.

"I know," Miranda said as she took Will's hand and began to walk to the doors, "But I thought it would be fun to show you, oh how did you put it the other night, 'what I do to keep the lights on.'" She said with an amused laugh as she looked over her shoulder at him. There was a twinkle of joy behind her eyes that had his heart imitating a hummingbird, a stark contrast to what it had done that morning.

"Yes, I did say that." He confirmed with smile and a nod of his head, as Miranda opened the door and led him in. The inside resembled that of any well end fashion boutique, with well-placed elegant chrome shelves that scattered around the off black walls. Each shelf had an accompanied mirror that hung next to it. Small dark wooden square tables sat well-spaced a part in the center on the room with different accessories placed on top. The tables helped break up the clothing racks that seemed to be reserved for only shirts or sweaters. Scattered around the store were mannequins, if the racks were only for sweaters and shirts than those were only for suits.

"This is just the storefront, where people are welcome to come in off the streets and have a look around," Miranda gave a small wave to the young man who sat at the register. Before she slowly walked around the space, not letting go of Will's hand. As she led him from one set of merchandise to the other "Buy what they want," she slipped a green scarf from where it was hung and held it in front of Will. "Hopeful they leave with a new insight of what their style might be." She said with a wink, before she set the scarf back. "Upstairs is where the

fun is." Her voice was on the edge between playful and sultry and it sent small waves of static through Will's body. "Let's go see."

"Wow." Was all that could get past his lips as the two stepped off the elevator and was greeted by a large spacious room, with sections that were divided by frosted glass and fat square support pillars. "So, this is where the magic happens." He said as his eyes roamed the work area; a few desks were set up by the large windows with people occupying them, all typing furiously at their computers. Now and then, someone would rush by either carrying boxes or rolled up pieces if fabric.

"Yes, it is, up here is where we design our next wave of outfits and where I do most of my work like marketing and other boring business stuff, I don't want to bother you with." Miranda took Will's hand and walked further into the area. "We also do more of the commission-based outfits like our suits here, while our larger orders like shirts and pants that are bought in bulk and sold in other stores are mostly sent out to made in factories." They walked to a much larger section that had a long rectangular table made out of metal, surrounded by sewing mannequins. Papers laid spread out on the table along with several pieces of fabrics, made out of different materials and other tools of the job. A women stood behind the table leaning over one of the scattered pieces of paper. She had round features and a sharp fashion style, the shoulders of her jacket could poke someone's eye out, if the eyes weren't already blinded by the De Stijl style patterns that littered it. Miranda suddenly began to pull Will over to the women, who seemed engulfed in her work.

"Will, I'd like to introduce you to my head designer Nichole," She beamed as the two approached the table, "Nichole this is Will." Nichole looked up from the paper, that could now be identified as a rough sketch for a men's style waistcoat, with an elegant vine like design. Nichole gave Will a toothy smile, her lips were decorated by a shade of purple that easily matched the purple on her jacket.

"So, you're the man Miranda's been going on and on about." She said as she leaned over and extended her hand. The gold chain that hung loosely from her ear that connected to her nose, caught a trace of sunlight and thrown it into Will's eye. It made him blink a few times and readjust his stance.

"Yeah, I guess I am," Will took her hand and tried not to focus on the acrylic nails that slightly dug into his skin. "Or I hope I am." He joked which earned him a playful slap on the arm that had him letting go of Nichole's hand and shift slightly holding his hands up slightly in mock defense.

"Don't you start," Miranda jokingly shot back, "Besides I don't talk about you that much."

"Oh please." Nichole smirked, "Miranda has done nothing, but nonstop talk about you and your guys' dates." She chuckled. "She practically prances around the office telling anyone who'll listen. She has us feeling like we were with you guys." Will glanced over to Miranda with a small smile, but it quickly disappeared when he laid his eyes on the blank look she had pointed at Nichole. "You should feel special Will," Nichole patted his arm, drawing his attention back to her, "you're like the first guy in months that Miranda has brought around here." She smiled at him before looking over to her boss and the smile quickly fell, Miranda had narrowed her eyes at her designer. Will could feel the air shift and it was clear the

Nichole did as well. She quickly cleared her throat and took a slight step back. “Uhm well, it was nice to meet you Will, but I have work to do.” Nichole’s voice was wary.

“Yes you do, we still need the rough sew of Mister Franks suit by the end of this week.” Miranda’s voice was stone cold, the friendly demeaner was long gone and only the head of the company was left. Nichole nodded her head as she stiffly turned to one of the sewing mannequins. Miranda took hold of Will’s wrist and began to storm away from the other women. They made it only a few feet away from the area before Will felt the need to say something to her, if not to see if she was okay to at least ask if she could loosen her grip on his wrist. He was pretty sure she was going to leave indents.

“Are you alright?” His voice cautious, Miranda turned to him sharply, anger boiled in her eyes and suddenly Will felt the need to take a step back. He was ready for that anger to spill out of her, instead she let out a heavy breath, almost deflating on the spot.

“I’m sorry about that,” Miranda said as she slightly gestured to the area they just came from, “I guess I just got a little embarrassed.” She shook her head slightly. “I shouldn’t have acted like that, but my emotions just got the best of me.” Will gently took both of her hands and it stopped Miranda from going off in her own long tangent of excuses.

“It’s fine, I get it.” Will looked down at their entwined hands and slowly rubbed his thumbs over hers, “If one of my colleagues began to tell you how I acted over our date, or brought up my past dating life,” Will clicked his tongue followed by a chuckle, “I’d either try to melt them with my imaginary heat vision or dig myself a grave on the spot.” He said as he looked back up at her and was met with a warm light smile. “It’s nothing to worry about, it happens to the best of us.”

“You can be a real sweetheart sometimes, has anyone ever told you that?” She asked her voice was soft and Will lightly rolled his head side to side, a play on mulling her words over.

“Hmmm, not that I can remember.” He softly laughed, before Miranda leaned forward and planted a soft peck on his lips, that had his heart replaying the melody from earlier and made his face flush. He would blame his burning red cheeks on the heat if someone dared to point it out.

“We’ll have to change that.” She whispered as she leaned in for another kiss, one Will hoped would be longer than the quick peck he was just teased with.

“Um Miss. Rhettford.” A small voice cut through their shared moment and Miranda let out a sigh and turned away from Will, to a woman he would describe as mouse like. She had wide eyes that filled half of her soft round face, her dark hair pulled back in the tightest ponytail Will had ever seen, and she clutched a company tablet close to her slim body.

“May I help you, Brittney.”

Will found himself forming a profile on the newcomer and he wished he could just turn that part of his mind off. *So, this is the assistant who Miranda would describe as a thorn in her side. You seem like the kind of person who needs constant supervision, probably afraid to let others down with simple mistakes. You were probably lashed at so many times in your past*

you forgot how to stand on your own. You don't mean to come off as what others would call needy, it's not your intention. You're just extremely cautious of those in charge, you live and breathe the need to please. You are seen as submissive by others and you know it.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you and uh…"

"This is Will, now please continue." Miranda crossed her arms and took a more authoritative stance, her look was sharp and focused, a reminder to those around who was in charge. The way she held herself at the moment reminded Will of Jack and for a moment he felt the need to get back to working on the case, instead of standing in a clothing workshop with Miranda.

"Right sorry," Brittney fidgeted uneasily as she began to quickly swipe though her tablet, an obvious way for her not to make eye contact with her boss. Will found himself slowly starting to feel bad for her. How many times had he done that same behavior with Jack or others, the answer was too many times that he cared to admit. "But I just got a call from Mrs. Meyer and she said she never received her custom-made sweater for her husband's anniversary gift." Miranda pursed her lips and narrowed her eyes, no longer paying attention to her assistant. But more to the information she was told and trying to figure out the next steps to take.

"I'll give her a call," She finally said, "there must have been a mistake with the shipping, maybe the address was filled out incorrectly or something." She sharply turned to Will with a wide smile that reached her eyes, it amazed him how quickly she could just flip personas. From stern boss to playful partner in just a blink. "This will only be amount and then after that's all cleared up, I'll treat you to some lunch." She gave Will's arm a squeeze and a soft kiss on his cheek, before turning back to Brittney and gestured for her to start walking in the direction to where he assumed was probably her office. "This is something you could have cleared up on your own." Will caught her saying to the other woman.

Alana watched with amusement as Hannibal poured her a tall glass of his home brewed beer. Before he walked over to her and handed her the glass half full of the clear blonde liquid, that shimmered beautifully when the rays from the afternoon sun reached the glass. Casting a glow on to her hand.

"Thank you, sometimes I still can't get over the idea that you brew your own beer." She smiled as she took the offering, "I don't think I'd have the patience to even try." She lightly chuckled

"Somethings are better enjoyed when made by one's own hand," Hannibal replied simply as he walked back over to his desk and began to pour himself a simple glass of Albariño, the liquid didn't catch the sun's rays as well as the beer, but it still shimmered in its own angelic way. "Why should one's beer be any different." He said with a simple tight-lipped smile as he walked back over to Alana and the two clinked their glasses together. Alana let out a little giggle at the action and Hannibal just crinkled his eyes and tilted his head slightly. Before he took a sip from his glass, no longer wanting to be involved in the playful behavior.

"I'm pretty sure you said that exact same line when we were in a very similar situation like this," Alana commented as she joined him taking her first sip, "here in your office sharing a

drink," Hannibal watched as the other psychiatrist began to walk around his space. Her fingers lightly trailing over his chairs followed by the edge of his desk, finally stopping at the fireplace that sat dormant. "The last time we shared a glass like this the topic of one Will Graham came up." she took another sip and turned her attention back to Hannibal, who rose his eyebrows slightly. As if confirming her suspicion of setting things up so distinctly familiar to their past encounter so they could talk about the man that they both shared in their lives without having to say anything. But it was obvious to the two that he wasn't going to admit to anything on those lines; even if true.

"I suppose you might be correct," He said before one longer sip, "this situation does share some similarities to that of the past I suppose." Alana playfully narrowed her eyes at him and he just responded with a small sly smile.

"I'd hate to disappoint you Hannibal, but I don't exactly feel up to playing this game of ring around," She said as she set her glass down on the nearest flat surface, "so if you want to talk about Will all you have to do is ask." She said with a smirk as she loosely crossed her arms, a stance that screamed how she just caught him in the act. Hannibal slightly ticked his head to the side and took one more sip of his wine, before he set it down on one of the small tables that sat by the chairs.

"Though he is a shared interest and this new person he has in his life is something we could discuss as friends," Hannibal began to slowly move around his office almost perfectly copying her movements from earlier. "The topic never crossed my mind when I invited you over to share an afternoon drink." He finished as he cast a look over to her and felt a small amount of enjoyment as he watched the smirk fall from her face and crash on to the floor.

"Huh, guess I miss read the room." Alana almost mumbled to herself as she absent mindlessly picked up her glass and took a drink from it.

On the contrary Bloom you actually read the room, as you put it, very well, I'd hate to admit, but I'm almost proud, only almost though. What you couldn't read was myself. I can't decide what I find more laughable, the fact you thought I would admit to wanting to talk about Will, or the thought you could make me.

Hannibal just slightly shrugged his shoulders, a movement so minuscule that one might miss it if they weren't looking and he picked up his glass, taking another long drink. "That's alright Alana not all of us can read the room so perfectly, I'll admit that I've been known to misinterpret some situations from time to time." He said giving off the illusion of trying to sooth the other, as he slowly walked over to her, "that's what makes us human, as one might put it." Though he often considered himself above the label as one.

"Thanks," Alana mumbled into her glass, "Well on the topic of Will, I actually had the chance to meet Miranda the other day." Alana said immediately lighting up on the spot. "You know the woman Will's been seeing and I have to admit they do make a lovely couple."

"Really." On one hand Hannibal was pleased that the seed he planted had taken root so quickly and now he could harvest the fruit. On the other hand, something deep inside of him began to slither. Tt was an emotion of some kind. What it might be he'd have to figure out later, at the moment he needed to focus on what Alana was about to tell him.

“Yes, see here’s what happened. I was going to check in on Will the other day after I was done with a seminar, to see how he was handling the resent case,” Hannibal had to hold back the strong urge to order Alana to skip the mind-numbing details of her need check up on Will almost every other day and get to the part he was deeply interested to know. Another urge had him wanting to inform her that she didn’t need to check up on Will so frequently in the first place, the man was *his* patient after all. “Anyway, I walk into his classroom and there they were both smiling and laughing about something. You could just tell they were enjoying just being in the same room with one another and when everything had settled you should have seen how Will looked at her.” Alana’s shoulder fell in relaxation as she reminisced on what might have been a heartwarming sight, before she gathered herself. “It was like a scene from one of those cheesy romance movies, all his attention was just on her and her alone. I pretty sure the Chesapeake Ripper could have come into that classroom and confessed to his crimes and Will wouldn’t even bat an eye.”

“She must be quite alluring to be able to hold Will’s attention so well.” The feeling that was just an annoying slither began to slowly pulse, he took another sip of wine hoping whatever that thing inside him would be settled with the alcohol. It was not.

“She is Hannibal. I mean she had this aura to her that I can’t quite place, it was like a mixture of confidence and elegance blended together. It flowed through her as though it was in her blood.” Alana swallowed the last of her beer and set the glass down, Hannibal knew he should have offered her more, that would be proper etiquette, but at the moment he didn’t want anything to get in the way of Alana’s ability to relay her tale of meeting Miranda to him. “The way she spoke was almost intoxicating. Like she was made to stand in front of a crowd and they would just listen with all their attention on her. When she walked, every step she took was calculated to the tee like she walked with a purpose in mind.” Alana picked up her emptied glass and swirled the last remnant of her beer and watched as it swayed at the bottom. Not enough to quench her thirst, but enough to draw her attention away from the topic. “Almost reminded me of *you*.” She sent Hannibal a playful smirk, he forced himself to return it.

“She sounds lovely.” The last word tasted bitter on his tongue and he tried to wash the taste away with the acidic flavor of the wine; it did little to help. The bitterness remained and the comparison between himself and Miranda only made it stronger.

“Yet when she would talk with Will, it was like she was another person. All what I described would just melt away, as if there was a side to her only reserved for him.” Alana set the glass back down and chuckled. “This might be the hopeless romantic in me, but I can see her becoming that strong foundation Will’s been looking for.”

“Perhaps.” Hannibal hungerly downed the last of his wine and was somewhat disappointed when the glass didn’t magically refill itself.

The fire was welcoming, the way the flames crackled and licked at the air was alluring. It had Will considering throwing a couple of logs into his own fire place when he got home, instead of just plugging in the space heater. He might have some wood on the back porch, if not he’d have to check his barn. It was an exceptionally cold day, a preview of what the up-and-coming winter might hold. Will found himself thankful for his fashion choices, wearing

mostly flannels and sweaters; along with the tendency to layer up, it was a welcome pay off for those chilly days that sprung out of nowhere. The fire that brought the fireplace in Lecter's office to life had Will hovering around it, while he waited for Lecter's opinion on the case.

Jack had called a head and asked if the doctor could lend his mind to help speed up the case progression that was currently moving along at a snail's pace. Throwing in the act of digging through the two victims' past relationships were not helping. Will's suspicions were right when it came down to the two managing to basically bury the information in money. The pictures of the crime scenes where neatly spaced on Hannibal's desk and the reports were stacked just at the corner. Hannibal gently leaned over his desk, hands clasped behind his back, as his eyes slowly roamed over the papers. Soaking in the information that laid in front of him ready to be devoured, like a well-prepared meal.

"The media is calling her The Black Widow." Will said as he chewed at his thumb's cuticle, throwing Hannibal a glance over his shoulder, before turning his attention back to the fire. Giving the other more time and space he might need. Will hated when other's crowded him when he was deconstructing a crime, he wasn't going to expose Lecter to the same treatment.

"Though cliché as it is, the name does suit the crimes presented." Hannibal said as he picked up a picture of Lloyd Banks, the aftermath of the kill was best described as brutal. *Whoever this woman is she has no taste for something more artful to do to the human body. Her mind is closed to other possibilities to humiliate these men. Though it could be classified as a creative I'm still disappointed that the police considered this work mine. I might have to remind them what real art looks like.*

Will let out a dry chuckle. "Killing her mates," he slowly turned his attention away from the fireplace, not done soaking up the heat, but slowly starting to lose interest in the way the flame danced for him. "Prey mantises do the same thing and yet no one's going to call her that." Will began to walk over to Hannibal, to stare at the photos as if he hadn't been doing that throughout the day.

"You have a fair point; prey mantises often would consume their partner after the mating ritual. It was so common that the males would often present another lesser insect for the female to consume to distract her during the act," Hannibal set the picture back down, "Tell me Will do you believe this Black Widow might be consuming these men's body parts?" Hannibal raised his eyebrow and watched as Will stared down at the photos, eyes searching for the answer, the profiler let out a little huff through his nose and shook his head slightly.

"No, she's not taking these parts to be eaten at a later date," Will tilted his head slightly and once again bit at his cuticle, "they're her trophies," he lightly ran his fingers over the dark pool of red that held frozen in the photo. Hannibal caught the slight twinkle that shimmered warily in the deep stormy pools of blue that were Will's eyes. How he wished to bring that twinkle out further and hold it in his hands and have it grow into something more pronounced, something that wasn't afraid to show itself. "She's taking them with her so she can look back and bask in her accomplishment. She's proud of what she's done to these men, ripping away the pendent of their status and wealth, showing them that they are nothing in her eyes." Will answered voice low and airy, he slowly leaned away from the desk, eyes

blinking rapidly as he crossed his arms, an attempt to reground himself. He caught himself slipping back into the mindset of the killer and he was not up for the mental roller-coaster.

“That’s very interesting, you might want to look into the sales of embalming fluids or similar chemicals. If the killer is going to preserve the parts as trophies like you suspect she’ll need the right equipment.” Hannibal supplied as he studied Will’s body language, the man was on the verge of closing himself off and he wouldn’t have that. Will just nodded his head as he ran his thumb over his mouth. “Dose Jack have any indication on what the weapon she might be using to bring these men to their ends?”

Will scrunched his face as he refocused himself. “Not at the moment, Beverly’s been looking over the wounds and been working on what blade could cause these kinds of cut.” Will leaned over the desk in search for the notes and close up of the sliced throats. “She noticed that the slices weren’t lean enough to belong to a knife, it’s thicker and it wasn’t as much as a cut, but more of a tear.”

While Will leaned further over the desk and dug through the photos that’s when a subtle fragrant slowly wafted up to Hannibal’s nose. Something he hadn’t caught onto earlier due to the more robust scent of the fire. The fragrant that had entered his space without his consent reminded him of the first day of spring, when the flowers were just starting to blossom, dew weighing down the new born peddles and the air refreshingly crisp. For a split-second Hannibal was confused to where the new scent could have come from, he knew it couldn’t have been a breeze from the outside; his windows couldn’t be opened, and his last patent had the tendency to smell of eucalyptus and stale bread. It had been two hours sense their visit; it was impossible for it to linger around. That only left.

“You changed your cologne.” Will retreated back to stand up, caught off by the sudden change in topic.

“Uh, yeah Miranda gave it to me, when we had dinner the other night.” Will’s voice was skeptical and almost hesitant. The gift was unexpected, it was supposed to be a simple dinner date after they were both done with work. It wasn’t going to be anything extravagant; Miranda had stated that she didn’t want to put Will through another fancy restaurant experience after their lunch date, just two days prior. Will had whole heartedly agreed with her on the spot, so he had offered to take her to a small diner that sat perfectly between both their location and was relieved when she agreed to his choice. When they had met, Will could basically see the excitement radiating off of her and he knew it wasn’t because they were about to sit down at a booth and indulge themselves with burgers and fries.

Before he could ask her, she had shoved a small gift bag at him, encouraging him to open it, not letting in any room for Will to ponder the gift for a second. He was surprised when he opened the bag and there sat a clear square glass bottle with the title Calm Winds etched into it in a blue gradient. Will had made the dig of his own choice in cologne and what the gift might imply. But Miranda quickly explained that while she was out, she had caught the scent from a shop and instantly thought of him.

“I wasn’t really sure if the cologne was for me,” Will uneasily explained, “but Miranda insisted I should give it a try, she’s always trying to get me to try new things. I’m pretty sure it’s some kind of goal for her at this point,” he chuckled rubbing the sides of his legs, “and I

didn't want to make her feel bad." Will shrugged as he began to look around the room, "It's kinda growing on me though. So, I'm going to keep wearing it, I like it and it makes her happy."

The slithering pulsing feeling from early had started to fester inside the doctor again. Instead of being deep inside his abdomen like before, he could feel it slowly boiling up wards threating to spread to his chest. It was like fresh hot tar was burning his insides with its adhesive slug. He had to identify it before it could coat all of him. If he could label the anomaly that hindered him then he could dispose of it properly.

"It is nice fragrance." *But it's not your fragrance my dear Will, no if I had my chance, I would gift you something that could play off your natural musk that you kept hidden under that dreadful aftershave you wore. Something that would have one reminiscing the deep woods in the fall that are untouched by outsiders, or something akin to a cool night after a brutal storm. Anything other than what she has you in at the moment. That fragrance will not do in the slightest.* "An improvement to what you were currently wearing if I might add." He lied, yet it had Will interpret it as a rare jab from Lecter and he let out a chuckle.

"Thanks, I'm glad it has your stamp of approval." Will smiled and Hannibal easily returned it.

"How is everything going between you and Miranda, if you don't mind me asking that is." Hannibal stepped away from his desk, indicating that he was no longer interested in talking about the case. Will just shrugged slightly and ran hand through his hair, obvious the topic still had a rocky foundation for him to discuss about when asked by Hannibal.

"It's going pretty well, I gave her a small tour around campus the other day," Hannibal already knew that, but he wasn't going to let Will know about his inquiring. "I was sort of returning the favor to her after she showed me where she worked earlier that week." This was Hannibal's chance, the topic laid out in the open, unsuspecting of any predator ready to attack it. If he wanted to get anywhere in identifying Miranda he'd have to pounce now.

"Pray tell, where does she work?" There was a pause in the air and Hannibal had wondered if he once again crossed a boundary. If he came off too interested and had accidently showed his true intention of prying. Will wasn't going to give him any indication on how he felt, his face was just blank for moment. The embers slowly igniting into flames.

Will could feel himself becoming wary of the conversation, something didn't sit right with the question, there had to be a motive behind it. Lecter wanting to know where Miranda worked made small prickles run under Will's skin and he had to fight the need to scratch at his arms. *Can you not be so paranoid for once Graham.* He thought to himself. *The good doctor is just curious on what goes on in your life, so is everyone else when you think about it. If Beverly or Alana asked, you wouldn't even hesitate and you know it.* Will let out a deep breath. "Miranda, she runs her own fashion company called Scarlet Swan Fashion; they produce mainly men's clothes. I don't know if you have ever heard of it or not." Will answered.

"That's very interesting, the name does sound familiar." Hannibal mused as he slowly walked around his desk, slightly starting to organize the papers that sat on top of it. "I believe an

associate of mine once ordered an article of clothing from them. Can't really recall what the article was, but he was pleased by the product." Hannibal said and looked over to Will, who gathered himself and walked over to help the other clean up the case file. He stared to grab a hold of the photos, not really carrying what order they went in, or if they were right side up or not. Hannibal; unnoticed by the other, leaned away from the desk, so he could watch Will with a sly smile playing at his lips.

"Do you two have any other plans coming up?" Hannibal asked, knowing the distraction would lower Will's guard and not have him thinking too hard on the question.

"Uh yeah, we're going to this movie theater called The Silver Screen this Friday," He answered nonchalantly as he pushed the photos together in a stack and moved onto the notes, "It's known for showing only retro style movies, never anything from the twenty first century." Will gathered the notes and taped them on the desk before sliding them in the folder with the photos. Before he slid the folder into his satchel and returned his attention back to Hannibal. "Turns out Miranda is also into classic movies and she found out that they'll be showing the classic Universal monster movie *The Wolf Man* and jumped at the chance to take me.*"*

"I didn't know you were into the classics."

"Always have been, ever since I bought this rinky dink VHS set from a garage sale with my first paycheck," Will shrugged as he adjusted the satchel on his shoulder, "I guess it's just one of those topics that come up during a dinner date or something." Hannibal felt the hot black tar begin to rise and make its way into his chest. It had him physically clenching his abdominal muscles in order to kept it at bay, he had to find the name to this abomination that plagued him. "Looks like my time is up Doctor." Hannibal was brought back to the present by Will's voice and he looked at his own watch and once again the time and slipped through his grasp without his knowledge.

"Looks like you are right," He said begrudgingly, "time flies when you're trying to solve a murder," He looked up from his watch and at Will, "let me show you out." He said with a crinkled smile as he guided Will to the door, his had slightly hovering over the curve of the small of Will's back. "I hope you two enjoy the film." He added as Will exited the room and was gifted with a thanks in return.

As Hannibal slowly shut the office door, he could still catch the fading scent of Will's new cologne. He could feel his skin begin to bristle and his jaw tightened as his teeth clenched together. That's when realization slowly filtered through his mind and it had his muscles unwinding. The boiling pustulant tar that had infected his body and threaten to coat his every nerve without permission. Started to make sense to him and he wished that it hadn't, Hannibal would rather live in unknown suffering then realize that the feeling that had emerged was nonother than *jealousy*.

Chapter End Notes

I just imagen Hannibal leaning against his office door clutching his chest and is all like "Oh no I have feelings!"

Sharing Spaces

Chapter Summary

Will and Miranda open their houses to one another, meanwhile Hannibal does some more of his own form of investigating.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Miranda's house was stunning. With its pristine white paint paired with dark blue trim, winding cobblestone driveway and the large Greek style pillars that supported the overhang porch roof. The two-story house; that could be categorized as a small mansion, made his own farmhouse look like a shed if he compared the two. Instead, Will found himself wondering if he had gotten the address right. The whole drive to her place he kept repeating the address in his head, along with setting up the GPS in his car. The device had been getting far more use than it was used too for the past couple of months and Will wouldn't be surprised if the gadget sort circuited soon.

He stood at the steps of the elegant house with his phone in one hand and his other in a closed fist. He looked down at his phone to check a list of confirmation to help ease his mind that tried to jump through every sing hoop that could cause doubt to invade his thoughts. He'd check the address and compared it to where he was, he had done this over four times since he pulled up in his car. The Volvo sat in the drive way like a sore thumb; if his mind wasn't already preoccupied with what ifs he might have felt a small sliver of self-consciousness. He would then start to scan over their text messages, just to make sure that Miranda had insisted the he should stop by her place before the movie. So, they could go together instead of just meeting over at the location like they have been doing for their past dates.

That was a pattern Will had noticed. Every time they would set up an outing, they would just meet at the location at a designated time, spend as long as they wanted together than just part. It had been going on for a while, he wouldn't be lying when he was somewhat relieved when Miranda had pointed it out instead of him. He could never find the words and he would hate himself if he came off as pushy if he had. So, when Miranda had taken the step to point out their little habit it felt like a weight was lifted for the profiler.

Will checked the last thing on his list and that was the time, he didn't want to show up too early for their date. If it was just to meet outside the movie theater then Miranda wouldn't know how early he had shown up, but since it was a direct meeting at her house, he didn't want it to come off in any negative way. He wanted to be right on time when it came to this and luckily, he was. He could give credit to him being punctual, but in reality, even with him looking up her address, memorizing the directions, and following the GPS instructions, he still managed to get himself lost at one point or another; good thing he left his house early

just in case that very situation happened. With one more glance at the time, he contemplated if he should shoot Miranda a text letting her know he was there or just knock. He already told her a head of time when he left his house and how long it would take him to arrive. Now he just had to make up his mind if he should knock or just text, he let out a breath and slid his phone into his back pocket opting to just knock. But as he reached over to the large blue wooden door, his hand quickly beelined for the doorbell instead.

The chime matched the house, low and heavy, yet elegant when its simple melody played out for the owner to hear. Will listened as the chime echoed its deep brazen voice through the large house for over ten seconds before it lulled to nothing, leaving him to stand on the porch and wait. He found himself feeling the slight need to ring the bell again, just to hear its alluring chime again. To feel it reverberate off the porch and keep the lurking awkward silence at a safe distance. Instead of acting on the intrusive thought, he simply let his eyes wonder around his surroundings.

The neighborhood was nice, extravagant houses spaced evenly apart, tress acting as make sift fences to help with the aesthetic and keep up a semblance of privacy. With almost identical neatly trimmed healthy lawns; that no doubt the owners probably hired someone to come maintained. Some lawns even had large fountains sitting in the center; a way to help the house stand out without coming off as tacky, and to finish off the exterior an overly priced car sat in each of the driveways. Now that his mind wasn't focusing on the what ifs like before Will had started to feel self-conscious, just imagining people in their houses peeking through their spotless windows and staring accusingly at him. Wondering what a man like him was doing in their poche neighborhood, with his mediocre car that cost less than their electric bill, wearing off the rack clothing and with his scruffy appearance. How dare he come and taint their pristine world with his existence. He could feel their eyes burning holes into his flesh like the tips of a lit cigarette, the doorbell was starting to look tempting to him again.

A rustle had caught his attention, for a moment Will just ignored the sound, blaming it on the birds in the trees or something on those lines. But when the rustle seemed to be growing louder was when he decided to bring his full focus towards it. Without moving his body; as to not draw attention to himself, Will just looked through the corners of his eyes. He knew the sound was coming from his left and it was moving towards him. Will searched for the rustling and pin pointed the noise originating from the trimmed shrubs that were planted along the front of the house. After getting nowhere with the little visual he could obtain and the on and off sound. Will decided to finally turn, he slowly maneuvered his body in order not to startle whatever it was and that's when he spotted the culprit.

Miranda's closes thing to a pet, halfway standing outside the shrub closes to him. Its large green unblinking eyes stared at him, one white paw in front of the other, caught in mid step. A small black and white cat. A soft smile crept over Will's face as he looked at the animal and thanks to the years of approaching strays his body began to act on instinct. He gradually began to squat down; not wanting to startle the feline.

"Hey." His voice was light and soft as he slowly offered his hand out, wrist limp as to show no harm. The cat backed up slight to make sure it had an exit plan as it pondered if Will was a threat to itself. "I'm not going to hurt you; I just want to say hi that's all." Will tilted his head lightly to the side. The black and white cat just stared at him, before it slowly began to move

out of the comforts of the shrub. Still on high alert, ears slightly bent, the tip of its tail lightly flickered, and eyes wide open. There was only a slight snag in progress when Will had shifted his body to reposition himself and the cat had jerked backwards, its mix matching ears pinned back and pupils thin like blades. He quickly cooed at the animal, apologizing for startling it and insisting that there was nothing to fear from him. The cat's eyes darted over him as it stood completely still, Will knew it was calculating whether or not it should take the chance.

"It's okay if you don't want to say hi," the cat's ears twitched forward at the sound of his voice and its eyes stopped darting, "I don't want you to do something you don't want to." The cat tilted its head as if it understood him, taking in his words and the options that were always its. Will watch with a slight delight as the feline walked over to his hand and began to gently sniff it. The short huffs of warm air on his knuckles sent goosebumps up his arms. "There you go," Will's smile grew as the cat began to rub its head against his hand, a clear indication of open affection. "See I'm not going to harm you," He said as he began to gently scratch the top of the cat's head, and felt light spirts of purrs vibrate through the animal's body, "just saying hi."

The click of the doorknob caught the animal's attention and like a built from a gun the cat quickly took off, running past him in a blur of black and white fur. Will watched as the blur disappeared around the corner of the house, only when the animal was no longer in his sights was when he realized that he was still squatting and he quickly stood up. Just in time for the door to open fully.

"Hello." Miranda greeted as she stepped out.

"Hi." Will returned as he straightened his jacket.

"I'm sorry it took me a minute," Miranda adjusted her knit coat and slid the strap of her purse over her shoulder, "I would have come out sooner, but I was too busy watching you make a new friend." She said with sweet smile as she pushed her hair behind her ear.

"Oh, you seen that." Will rubbed the back of his head as a small wave of awkwardness ran through his body.

"Yes I did, and I must say I'm impressed," Will tiled his head to the side, wondering what was so impressive about him being able to pet a cat, "you're one of the few people around here who were able to get that close." She finished as took a step closer to Will, pressing a light kiss on his lips and the awkwardness that tried to make itself at home within himself slowly began to evaporate. To be replaced by the flower of warmth that started to fill out his chest and slowly roam under his skin.

"I can thank my dogs for that." His smile was effortless.

"Speaking of dogs, I believe we have a movie to go see." Miranda smiled as she wrapped her arm around his and pressed herself into his side, the warmth that spread through his body fluttered for a second and Will began to lead her towards his car.

"It's no Rolls Royce, but it's reliable." Will stated as he opened the passenger door for her. A sudden wave of confusion washed through his mind. *Why did I feel the need to justify my car*

choice, since when do I car what others thought about my Volvo?

“Thank you.” Miranda said as she stepped inside the car and waited for Will to do the same, before she continued talking. “Sometimes reliable trumps luxury in my opinion.” She finished as Will began to back out of the driveway. “And to be honest the Royce was a gift to myself. I bought it after reaching a milestone in my life.” She added. Will just hummed in response not quite sure if Miranda was trying to justify her purchase or trying to make him feel better about his Volvo. If she asked about his response, he would chalk it up to him trying to focus on the road.

“You don’t have to purchase the popcorn you know that right.” Miranda stated as they walked over to the large concession stand and took their place in line behind an elderly couple. Will caught the older man complaining about the obnoxious noise coming from the rip off version of the Pac-Man arcade machine. That sat just in the corner of the lobby next to a nearly busted claw machine filled with cheaply made plush toys that looked like they might fall apart if you even breathed on them. Along with a few standard racing games that helped even out the space.

“You bought the tickets, so I’m buying the snacks.” Will said as the slowly moved forward. Now the older man was complaining about the overly priced food and how back in his day a thing of popcorn only cost fifty cents and that was for a large. Will was pretty sure that wasn’t the truth and the old man was just being dramatic at that point.

“But you also drove use here.” Will lightly chuckled at Miranda’s attempt to convince him to let her pay for the whole night.

That was another pattern the two faced so often when they went out. Miranda had a tendency to always pay for everything. Once in a while he would be able to grab the bill before she could, but most if not all the time Miranda would be the one to reach for the check first or insist that she’d just wanted treat him. It made him feel a little uneasy about it, like he was taking advantage of her wealth without actually taking advantage of her wealth. Every time Will would bring it up with her, she’d just tell him there was nothing to worry about and it was all in his head. But he knew it wasn’t.

“Sorry still buying the popcorn,” He said before looking over to her with a smirk, “you won’t be changing my mind.” Miranda lightly shook her head.

“Fine, but,” Miranda leaned closer to Will her voice a whisper, “no drinks.” He glanced over at her with a cocked eyebrow and Miranda deviously smiled as she patted her large purse. He gave her a mocked surprised look and held a laugh at such a small deceitful act.

“Duly noted.” He smirked as they finally approached the cashier.

“That was nice,” Miranda mused as they walked out of the theater two hours later, “just you and me sitting down to watch an old classic after a busy week.” She said as they walked down the nearly empty sidewalk towards Will’s car.

“Yeah, it’s nice to just turn your brain off and watch a classic movie,” Will agreed, “wouldn’t mind doing it again.” He added as he stuck his hands in his jacket pockets, there was a blunt

chill in the air again and he could see his breath in the red neon light illuminating off the theater sign.

“Then let’s do that.”

“What?” Will asked as he stopped and looked over at Miranda with confusion.

“Let’s make it a thing we do,” she restated, “every Friday night why don’t we get together and just watch an old movie. We don’t have to come here; you can come over to my place and we’ll make a giant bowl of popcorn and just watch any classic movie.” Miranda was beaming with excitement again at the idea and Will found himself fighting with his own emotions. The idea of such a structured routine for some reason was setting something off in his mind. He couldn’t explain why the thought of starting a routine with Miranda suddenly felt jarring to him. What they had was unpredictable, they never knew what their next date would be or when and some part of Will liked that. It gave space for the two to breath, but another deeper part of Will; apart he never acknowledged before, didn’t exactly like the space in the slightest. In fact, it detested the space that was held in place and that part spoke an octave higher than its counterpart.

This ready to be born routine did sound nice, the more he thought about it. Something to look forward to at the end of a long week leading up to an always short weekend. To have something set in place, Will hardly had anything like that for him. The few things set in place that could resemble a routine for him were few and far between. He had his lectures, but Jack had put an end to that routine, there were his dogs they had an almost solid routine, and finally there was what he had with Lecter. The seven thirty standing appointment, always waiting for Will to fill once a week sometimes even twice when he was feeling exponentially unhinged. A routine Will never wanted in the first place, yet somehow ended up needing. Maybe this newly hatched idea might end up being something on those lines, a routine he never knew he needed until it was put in place.

“That does sound nice.” Will said with a sheepish smile, as he pushed down the begging need to keep up the space that was held between them. Miranda’s smile widened at the agreement, but it was suddenly washed away when a harsh gust of wind ran past them. Leaving the older woman in a bundle of shivers, her knit jacket didn’t stand a chance. “Oh, here,” Will quickly shrugged off his jacket and draped it over her, “this’ll help.” He said softly as he helped adjust the jacket around her shoulders.

“Thank you very much, I knew I should have listened to my weather app,” Miranda lightly giggled as she closed the jacket around her, before she looked over at Will and cocked her head to the side. “Aren’t you going to be cold now?”

“No not really, I tend to dress in layers see,” Will slightly rolled up his sweater sleeve to revile a rustic flannel, “helps fight off the cold.”

“Maybe I should start doing the same.” Miranda said as she tightened the jacket and fought off another shiver. Will didn’t need to use his profiling skills to read the situation, he draped his arm around Miranda and slowly guided her to his side, to help battle the tempter. His ears picked up a small hum from her as she leaned into his side and Will felt a flutter in his stomach.

The inside of Miranda's house was fanciful to say the least. Cloaked in whites and golds furnishing that matched the walls and stood prominently against the black marble flooring. Paintings of different sizes in elegant wooden frames filled parts of the walls and the large white staircase with its golden railing stood at the end of foyer. Will felt misplaced standing outside her house now he felt like an extraterrestrial just standing in her foyer. Not quite sure what he was supposed to do, Miranda had walked off as soon as they entered. Disappearing around a corner leaving Will to just stand by the door and wait for her return.

Discomfort started to build up in his chest and it had him wondering why he agreed to come inside the house in the first place. *Maybe because you simply like spending time with her, not everything needs some insightful reasoning behind it, remember what Lecter told you, somethings don't need a standard reason just one that makes sense to you.* He thought to himself as he tucked his hands in his jean pockets.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Miranda leaned back around the corner, "poor hosting skills on my part," she giggled, "the living room is right over there," Will looked to where she had pointed then went back to look at her, "you can make yourself comfortable while I make us something to drink." She smiled with a wink before she ducked back around the corner. Will swallowed the awkward lump that formed in his throat, before he made his way to living room.

Will leisurely walked around the large room taking in the lavish décor that was lovingly placed around the area. Small ivory angel statues that were no taler than his shin sat in every corner, each in different poses some with bows and arrows, other holding up flat surfaces to act as table tops. A white fan back chair sat by a tall book shelf that nearly touched the ceiling. When Will followed where the shelf stopped he was met with an electric chandelier, the crystals that hung delicately from its curved arms twinkled in its own light almost memorizing to his eye. But he looked away from the gaudy ceiling décor and continued to take in the rest of the living room. A large fire place stood tall under a mounted flat screen television that a plush cabriole sofa with its white fabric and gold trim sat in front of.

Have to give it to Miranda for sticking with a theme. He thought to himself as he nudged the possibly fake white fur rug that the couch sat on top. But something told him that the fur was real, that Miranda only wanted the real thing, nothing fake would decorate her house. He walked over the arch shaped windows that almost filled out a whole wall and stared out into the dark night. The warm light from the living room sketched a perfect shadow of the window frame on the lawn, along with his own. He watched as his shadow swayed on the lawn as the wind rippled through the short grass. A part of Will expected to witness his silhouette to just vanish with the wind like a puff of smoke, never to be seen again. He often felt the same might happen to him, just one day he would wisp away with the autumn wind and not be heard from. Who would notice his absence first, who would even care?

"I hope you like whiskey." Miranda's smooth voice broke Will of his trance and he stiffly turned away from the window from his darkening thoughts and towards Miranda. Who held two crystal tumblers, both filled with a dark amber liquid that engulfed the warm light.

"I do actually." Will simply stated as he walked away from the window to meet Miranda by the couch. Where he was handed the glass and he studded as the liquid swayed in the transfer of hands. How the whiskey clung lightly to the sides of the glass and tainted the round ice

ball that rested in the liquid. He held the glass under his nose and gently breathed in the aroma that lifted off the whiskey. Taking in the bitter thick scent that reminded him of coffee followed by a small linger of spice that matched the time of year. The smell alone had his mouth watering for the drink, he knew right away this drink would spoil his palate and it might make him no longer able to satisfy himself with the bottles in his own liquor cabinet at home.

“It’s Glenmorangie Signet,” Will turned his attention away from his glass and over to Miranda, who was now standing by the large fireplace, with a small remote in her hand, “if you were wondering what I just gave you.” She smiled over her shoulder as she pressed a button on the remote and the fireplace came to life in a mere second. “There now we can get all nice and cozy.” Miranda added playfully as she took a sip from her glass and walked over to Will.

“Thanks.” Will said as he did a light gesture with his hand as a way to say cheers; Miranda returned the gesture still holding her smile, before he took his first drink of the whiskey and he was right. The syrupy liquid coated his tongue like oil, the wave of sizzling tobacco that played with soft dash of orange paired with bitter sweet coco greeted his tastebuds. Will felt the teasing burn alight his throat as he swallowed and it pooled into his stomach like he just ingested a piece of ember from the fire. He knew as soon as the whisky touched his tongue it was going to be difficult to be able to appreciate the obviously cheaper brands. “This is really good.” He said after the alcohol settled into his stomach; the whiskey still coated his tastebuds with a soft residue of cinnamon. He ran the tip of his tongue over his lips to catch any lingering liquid before taking one more drink.

“I thought you might like it,” Miranda said as he began to sit down on the couch and Will found himself mirroring her behavior, their bodies just a few inches apart. “I tend to lean towards more richer tasting whiskeys,” Miranda swirled the liquid in her glass, watching as the waves of amber brushed against the crystal sides and catching the ember light from the fire. “Something with a fuller body that burns for the right amount of time, that glides down your throat a little too easy,” She mused as she took another sip, Will found himself watching as she softly placed her lips on the edge of the glass while the dark amber washed passed. The light red imprint from her lipstick left behind as she lowered her hand. “Leaving you wanting more.” She said sending Will a sensual glance and a slight knowing smile, before trapping Will with her gaze and they both simultaneously set down their drink.

It could have been the whiskey; people called it liquid courage for a reason, that helped dull the almost onslaught of what ifs that plagued his mind on a daily basis. The way their bodies always found themselves close together throughout the night. Either sitting in cramped theater seats, shoulders pressed tight or huddled for warmth, but their bodies always seemed to be pressed to one another. The heat from the fire that helped enhance the already sensual atmosphere. The way Miranda’s eyes held a shine from the flame and something more provocative underneath. Whatever the reasons could be, Will found himself acting on his own desires, he wasn’t going to be caught in his own head like he was on their first date.

Will felt his heart begin to beat heavily as his hand gently reached out to caress the side of her face, he slowly leaned in. Miranda in the same pace began to move forward as well, letting Will guide her over to him. Their face inches apart, foreheads resting lightly against

one another, Will was the one to shorten the gap and connected their wanting lips in a much more sensual kiss than before. The taste of the Glenmorangie Signet shared between them as they opened up to one another. Both shifted in their seats trying to gain as much contact as possible, no longer satisfied with just the building heat of the kiss. Will found himself needing to do something with his free hand, he couldn't just leave it at his side. He reached out to her and he let his fingers become lost in her long black waves of hair. Miranda leaned into his body, her soft chest pressing into his with enough guiding weight to have Will lean back, until he was pressed into the cushions of the couch as she began to maneuver on top of him. Draping herself over him, entrapping him in her natural warmth and delicate flesh.

The kiss deepened in their new found position, tongues gliding next to each other; the remaining taste of the rich whiskey, it's scorching mocha like flavor was shared between them as they explored one anthers mouth. No hesitation between them while they sought out pleasure only the other could give. Lost in the lust and heat that they both shared for another. Heartbeats thrashing against their cages, trying desperately to break free in means to be close.

Miranda took a hold of one of Will's hands and guided it, to her side and slowly urged for movement. Will was happy to obliged the request and began to lightly stroke the area, taking in her curves and the way her flesh gave way under his touch. Her hands trailed to hold his face as she pushed further into him, Will felt Miranda begin to lightly grind on top of him. A wave of static sailed throughout his body. A heat began to form in the pit of his stomach from the provocative action, a small burst of fire that teased as to what it might erupt into. One of Miranda's hands ran through his hair, not carrying if her fingers caught a curl or two. While the other slowly ran down his cheek, nails teasingly dragged along the flesh. Not hard enough to leave marks, but the pressure indicated that it could change at any second. All while she sucked tenderly on his plush bottom lip. Miranda once again took Will's hand and began to move it closer to her chest, no longer satisfied with the tender strokes and encouraged his hand to explore more of her body. A moan finally escaped one of them, neither quite sure who made the lustful sound.

Will found himself lost in the natural softness of her body as his hand did as it was signaled to do, he caressed her breast and another moan was heard as he gently applied just the right amounts of pressure with his fingers and the heal of his hand. He then felt Miranda's hand lightly travel down his side, her feather like touch leaving tails of goosebumps and found it's place at his inner thigh, before tenderly beginning to massage the area. Mimicking the same movements that he was doing to her chest, sending another harsh wave of static coated pleasure through his body. The nip she gave his bottom lip did not help ease the travel, it only enhanced it.

How far is this going to go? Will thought in his haze of passion, *Am I even ready for this, are we even ready for this?* The questions bombarded his head as he tried to force his focus back onto Miranda, especially when she flicked her tongue against the roof of his mouth and he let out his own desired soaked moan. No longer paying those threating thoughts any mind. As he raised his hips slightly to meet her own grind.

A high-pitched jingle rang throughout the house; louder than the door chime.

“Just ignore it.” Miranda’s voice was heavy as she tried to reinitiate their kiss and stop what they were building between them from collapsing.

“More than happy to.” He breathed as he recaptured her soft supple lips with his, their fire was threating to die and they both needed to keep the flames going. But no matter how hard they tried, the annoying jingle from her phone managed to put ever obstacle known to man in their path. Causing everything to came to a gawkish halt. Their breath heavy and whatever that was building up between them came crashing down. Miranda pulled back, biting her lip in displeasure as she eased her body off of Will. Who began to maneuver himself out from under her, already missing her warmth.

“I’m really sorry about this.” Miranda said as she fully stood up, straightening out her shirt and Will watched as she tried to control herself as she walked out the room. Leaving him there to recover from the light headed high, his nerves dulling down, and the heat slipping away. He returned back to his drink, the whiskey now warm from the fire and the ice long gone. He held the glass to his lips, but even the enticingly rich drink couldn’t bring him to follow through with the act of ingesting. He just sat there holding his drink and he watched the flames dance for him, but even with his mind preoccupied with fire something felt off.

A sensation began to prickle under his skin, and he found himself turning away from the fire and back towards the windows. He cautiously got to his feet and began to walk over to the beaconing darkness that was held back by the glass. Whatever this odd feeling that made his hair stand on end, he knew was coming from outside. There was something or someone out there hidden in the darkness, watching him and her with predatory eyes. He could feel it’s eyes on him, stabbing into his skin like small pins causing his nerves to heighten as he grew closer. Will didn’t really know what he would do if he did see someone out there on the lawn, he didn’t have his weapon and he wouldn’t be able to tell if he could be able to take down this pepping tom, until he laid his eyes on them.

“God, I wonder why I put up with that girl.” Miranda’s harsh voice startled Will and he quickly turned from the window; his heart nearly lodged in his throat.

“I’m sorry what?”

“Brittney, that girl always has this disgusting habit of calling me just at the worst time,” Miranda hissed as she went over to pick up her glass from the floor, her face sharp with unreleased irritation, “sometimes I feel like she does it on purpose.” She mumbled into her glass as she took a hardy drink, hand heavy on her hip.

“I pretty sure she doesn’t mean to interrupt you all the time,” Will interjected as he walked over to her, breaking away from the creeping claws of the darkness. “She probably just doesn’t want to disappoint you.”

“You’re just saying that because you feel sorry for her.” Miranda took another drink and just stared at the rippling flames. What she said might be true, Will wasn’t quite sure where he stood on the topic. When he met the assistant, he could just tell all she wanted to do was stay out of trouble and do right by her boss. But he had to agree with Miranda the onslaught of calls was never going to help her case, it will only hinder her. “But I wouldn’t, I know that girl can stand on her own, all she has to do is try.” Miranda tried to smile, an attempt to

rekindle the flame they had going before the call, but it was obvious to them both, that what might have happened that night was no longer in play. The mood had been ruined. They just stood in heavy silence, both looking at anything in the room, until Will decided to break it.

“I guess I should get going,” He said as he once again set his glass down, “it’s getting late and I don’t want to keep my dogs waiting. They get anxious if I’m gone too long.” He justified and Miranda nodded her head.

“I totally understand,” Miranda said holding her glass with both hands, “it was still a nice night even if it had to end like it did.” She attempted a cracked laugh, “And I did enjoy having you over at my place, maybe we can try something again. Like dinner or something.” She offered. Will studied the offering she had just given him; he knew that a next step in any relationship would be to share more personal spaces with one another. Miranda had made the first move in showing him where she had worked and in return Will did as well. Relationships were a give and take performance and Miranda had done most of the giving and he wanted to put a stop to that as much as he could. If that ment stepping out of his comfort zone, he would.

“How about you come over to my place this Sunday,” Will spoke, “I’ll make us a nice dinner and you can meet my pack.” He finished with a crooked smile and he witnessed as Miranda perked up at the offer.

“I would love too.”

Hannibal Lecter did not get jealous, the pathetic excuse of an emotion was beneath him. He would allow himself to feel anger, he welcomed the feeling of pride, and disgust is what kept his pantry full. But jealousy he would never, he’d rather succumb to fear before even entertaining the idea that he felt jealous towards a woman he only heard second hand stories about. That would just be pathetic and he held himself far above the notion of being either.

If he had to reason with his actions Friday night, he would label it as his curiosity, simple and sweet. Hannibal was just curious about this new woman in Will’s life and simple internet exploration would no longer suffice. Thanks to his dear Will giving him Miranda’s occupation, he had gained some information on her, she had a larger electric foot print than previously thought. Thanks to the articles that circled the woman, he now knew what she looked like, no longer having to deal with the odd silhouette that took shape in his mind. Hannibal wouldn’t lie, the woman was appealing to the eye, he could see how Will ended up falling for her. She did have a classical elegance to her, the way she held herself for the camera, Miranda was woman who knew what she was gifted with. Much like Hannibal himself. If he was a weaker man, he might have felt a sting of attraction for her just like Will had. But Hannibal was stronger than that, to even feel anything when looking at the photo would be inexcusable.

The doctor had his fill on what the world wide web had granted him, he decided to do some on foot investigating. Once again Will had supplied the right amount of information without realizing the beast he was unintentionally feeding. It took a simple search to locate the cinema the younger man was going to and when the film would be showing. Having memorized Will’s work schedule Hannibal had deduced the time that the two would be

arriving, eight thirty the second to last show. They would be sitting down to enjoy a nice black and white monster movie while he sat down to watch them.

He had parked his Bentley just on the other side of the street, shadows from the buildings mixed the night easily covered the black car and he waited for the two to make their first appearance. It didn't take long for Will and Miranda, Will had parked only a few feet away from the theater. He watched as Will walked around his car and opened the passenger side door.

I'm impressed Will, you actually do know how to be a gentleman, under those ill-fitting clothes and sharp attitude is something a tad bit polished. You always find some way to surprise me. Hannibal thought as Will took her hand and helped her out of the car, before they made their way over to the ticket booth, arms loosely linked together with stereotypical couple smiles plastered on both their faces. Hannibal noted how Miranda was the one to pay for the tickets, along with how Will tried to do the same, but she had refused to let him, even affectionately slapping his arm as he reached for his back pocket where his wallet was held. *I wonder how many times that has accord during your dates Will. How many times has she ripped away a check from you, refusing you to spend just a single dime on her. Do you enjoy the idea or does it irk something in you my dear boy, to not have some control in situations like those. Does it make you feel inadequate?* Will and Miranda made their way through the square glass doors to begin their little movie escapade, leaving Hannibal alone with his thoughts.

While he waited for the two *love birds*; the tittle alone rose a bitter taste in his mouth that he had to will away, he went over the rest of the information he gathered through his mind. Besides a photo he also gained some insight of the woman's background, she had the standard story of growing up in a small town where she felt like she never fit in. Only dream was to make a name for herself and prove to other's that all it takes is hard work to make it happen. Honestly it was painfully boring and flavorless to the psychopath. Along with being dreadfully cliché in his own opinion, it had him questioning if the back story was even real to begin with. It sounded too precise, too typical, something one would only expect to read in an online article about a self-made business woman. No, there was another reason for her other than just the painfully obvious cliches she spoke of.

Will and Miranda exited the theater right on time, they were no longer arm in arm, but still walking side by side. Part of him wished to know what their conversation must have been, for Will to suddenly stop dead in his tracks and turn towards the woman. He could make out the younger man's expression and he knew it all too well, he was battling with his own emotions once again; Will tended to be doing that a lot lately. Hannibal just wanted to know why, maybe he could rip it out of the man during their next session; if he could wait that long.

What's the issue Will, did she say something so baffling you cannot comprehend it as easily as you truly wish you could. Did she offer something so far from your chosen comfort it has you battling your instincts. A fork in the road which path shall you choose Will.

The face slowly slipped away and was replaced with an uncertain smile and whatever path he had chosen made Miranda beam with joy. Hannibal adjusted in his seat leaning forward as he watched with hard eyes as Will slid his jacket off and draped it over Miranda's shoulder, the

affectionate sight made the slithering pestilence that now called his body home to writhe for the first time that night. Thrashing out its dark dripping tentacles and taking hold of his ribs. He watched as Will guided her to his side and she moved to the place as if it was second nature for her. Hannibal hadn't realized how hard he had gripped his steering wheel until he went to reach to turn the ignition. There he seen his knuckles nearly white as the moon in the sky. He quickly gathered himself, regaining his composure and returned his attention back to the task at hand. To see where this Miranda called home.

The house matched the woman, showing off her wealth without being obnoxiously blunt about it. It was one of the more subtle houses in the neighborhood, plain pant job and nothing in the yard to help it stand out amongst the rest. Hannibal had trailed them from the theater and he parked just a little away from the house. Hannibal wouldn't say he was being cocky when it came to not being too inconspicuous when he parked. He knew all too well that with a neighborhood like this that the residence would be putting all their focus on the Volvo that drove on their street and not giving his Bentley a second glance. He belonged amongst them after all while the profiler did not. This gave him an extra layer of cover to work in his favor. Taking the rest of his task on foot, Hannibal walked towards the house. Acting as just another member of their society, he leisurely walked along the paved sidewalk, conveying how much he belong there. He was just out for a nightly stroll nothing for them to look at.

He kept a tasteful distance as he watched Will and Miranda enter her house, where he had lost them. The front window curtains were drawn tight, if he wanted to know what might be going on he'd have to move, use the thick shadows of the night to his advantage, along with the large trees that acted as a privacy barrier. Hannibal left the sidewalk and entered the darkness that offered it's help to him. He spotted an open source of light coming from the right of the house and he followed the shadows to the warming light that stretched across the lawn. It limited his cover to the trees, but where there was loss there was also gain. He peered through the arched window from his distance and was greeted by a kitchen. Much larger than his own, white cabinets that aligned the walls, a high-end chrome fridge, large spacious countertop, and an island that helped fill out the room. Hannibal could tell it wasn't as used as his though, he knew the difference between well-kept; like his, and hardly used. Miranda walked into the kitchen sliding off Will's jacket and placed it on the kitchen island, as if it already belonged to her. Hannibal would break in and take the jacket before he let her have it. Miranda soon turned to one of the many cabinets and opened it, reviling several crystal glasses and began to reach for two tumblers. Before she quickly stopped and walked back to the door way, leaning out slightly.

So, you finally remember you have a guest in your house, that it's not just you. I must say what dreadful hosting skills. Hannibal mused, a light flicker of his lips, before he refocused himself as Miranda reentered the kitchen and finished the task she abandoned. Hannibal noticed as Will finally made an appearance in the house. It was only a glimpse as the man walked past the doorway and towards the location the woman probably told him where he could go. *Did you stay put by the door Will like a good boy, while you waited for her instructions. Once again acting like one of you strays. Not sure what to do in a strange location, while discomfort threatens to overtake you. Make you start questioning yourself, your choices.*

Though he wanted to follow where Will had walked off, he wanted to know what Miranda would be serving for the night, just to satisfy that little edge of curiosity he had. He watched as Miranda walked out of view and returned with a tall cylindrical bottle that tapered at the top. Due to his distance Hannibal couldn't quite make out the label on the bottle, just a large golden square that took up the front and stood out against the dark liquid that it held. He knew it was going to be a rich drink, something told him that Miranda only enjoyed the highest qualities of things; just like himself. No, he mustn't do that, comparing himself to this woman would be his undoing. Hannibal had enough of watching her attempt at playing hostess.

Let's see where Will has wondered off to. He thought as he began to walk around the house, as expected there was no fence to close off the backyard, making it easy for him to stalk the grounds. Like the natural predator that he was. Unlike the front yard, where it was just a plain green lawn, the backyard was its mirror opposite. A large inground rectangular pool stretched across the yard eating away at the grass and casting a turquoise hue against the house. Hannibal left the coverage of the tress and walked around the pool area, taking in his reflection in the water as he made his way to the back entrance. He wasn't going to enter the house; not tonight, no he was seeing his options. Two French doors was what he was given to work with, Hannibal reached out and took in the metal door levers, he gave a small twist and wasn't at all surprised to see that they were locked, but now he knew what he would be up against if he did decide to enter her house.

He looked up from the levers and caught the reflection of the pool in the door and the image of Miranda perched at the edge of pool began to appear in his thoughts. Wearing a tasteful black one-piece, paired with butterfly shades and most likely one of those ridiculously large brim hats, as she basked in the summer sun. Her legs; that would pair exponentially well with a brown butter and sage sauce, dipped in the cool welcoming water. Hannibal could ignore the image; it was just his mind trying to get away from him, distract himself. What he couldn't ignore was the sudden visitor that entered the illusion. Miranda wasn't alone in the world of make believe that he had gifted her to life in, she had company, someone that his imagination liked to torture him with.

Will's double emerged from the deep waters, rising as if he was Venous in the scallop shell. Droplets of water gradually ran down his bare chest caressing his lean muscles and soaking his smooth skin. Helping the sun's rays in hance the already eye-catching sight, he glistened like the diamond in the rough that he was. Will began to swim towards Miranda, showing her how he was able to cut through the water with ease as if he was just taking a stroll; thanks to years of living primarily on the lake. He swam to her side and rose up to meet her and she leaned down half way. Hannibal harshly turned away from the pool, before his imagination could go even further.

He walked away from the burning illusion, for the second time that night refocusing himself on the task at hand. Grounding himself back into reality, where there was no summer sun, there was no glistening water, and there was no Will. Just the cold autumn night, dark shadows, and his gnawing feeling of curiosity. He returned back to the tree line as he walked to the other side of the house where he was met with yet another warm light that extended across the grass.

This is where you disappeared too. He thought as he laid eyes on Will. Who stared out into the night with glazed eyes. *What thoughts might be lurking in you as you stare out here, to be causing such a hard look.* Hannibal followed the others gaze and noticed the silhouette on the grass. *Is your own shadow now causing you distress my dear Will, could it be that you know that your shadow reflects what is lurking inside you and the sight of it reminds you of the harsh truth. It's something you can't run from I'm afraid, not when it's attached to you.*

Will stiffly turned away from the window and walked back into the living room, where Miranda was waiting for him by the fireplace with two glasses. He gingerly took the drink that was offered to him and began to study the liquid, before taking a light sip form the glass after Miranda did the same with hers. Hannibal only took his sight away from the window, when a soft rustle from his right caught his attention. For a split moment Hannibal believed that he was spotted, he hadn't prepared an exit strategy in case someone did walk upon him in the dark. He might be able to use is silver tongue on the person, but that might not work out in his favor, there were only so many questions he could walk around and so much natural charm he could give. Then there was always the more violent approach, but if he took that route, he'll have deal with the outcome of a dead body and the risk of drawing attention to himself.

The rustling grew louder as it approached the doctor and he still hadn't made up his mind on which side of himself would he let out. All the rushing in his mind came to a stop when a small black and white cat walked around a tree. It stopped dead in its tracks as it took in the sight of the well-dressed man standing admits the trees. The feline just stared at him knowing that he did not belong there and Hannibal just stared back at the animal, which one would break the eye contact first could not be answered by either one of them. If he moved the cat might run off and in its fear like haze might cause it to alert the neighborhood, he had to leave it up to the animal. The cat just stared at him for a moment more, before letting out a sharp hiss and darting off into the trees. *It must be true animals do sense evil; good thing Will's dogs seem to be blind to it.*

Hannibal turned away from where the creature had run off to and was met with a sight that had his mind slamming on the breaks. The sight twisted the tar in his body, causing it to tighten the hold on his ribcage, drawing the bones inward until they were taut. Threating to snap at any moment. His trimmed nails dug into his palms; his teeth ground tightly in his clenched jaw all while he watched the two adults acting like two horny teenagers. Groping each other's bodies, in tasteless lust brought on by the environment, all while they devoured one another's faces. He watched with venom as Miranda guided Will's hand over different parts of her body, while he was pressed into the couch under her, doing as he was guided and he let her do as she wished to him. The way her hands traveled through his hair, the way she effortlessly began to grind on top of him, and how he was beginning to reciprocate the action. It was all so very disgusting. Hannibal was relieved when their little act come to a sudden halt. *Thank whatever deity there is that put a stop to that eye retching sight. My stomach might not have handled the sight much longer.*

Miranda left the room, clearly failing to hide her irritation, she knew what was causing the disruption. Leaving Will to sit alone on the couch, with a glass in his hand. *What's wrong boy, are you already missing her body even though not a few seconds prior you were practically locked together in shambolic pleasure. How utterly pathetic of you Will.* Hannibal ceased his

thoughts when Will slowly straightened and turned his attention towards the window. *What is it my dear Will?* Will carefully got off the couch and made his way towards the window; his eyes searching for something. *Could it be that you can sense my presence without realizing it. Your inner beast knows that I am out here watching you act like an amorous fool, that it can sense that its other half is just beyond the glass. Not in the other room, but right outside.*

Will checked the chicken for what felt like the fiftieth time in the last hour, he watched through the oven screen as the dismembered bird sat in the deep baking dish. As the sauce bubbled lightly in the oven's heat as it coated the bird in its bonze color. The dish only needed a few more minutes, until he would remove it and have it rest on his counter top. He knew he didn't need to check the dish so often, he had made the meal a handful of times before, hell he knew the recipe by heart. When he needed to turn the meat, when to drizzle more syrupy sauce over the bird along with the onions, and when he needed to uncover it. Yet here he was standing in his kitchen waiting for what could possibly go wrong to go wrong. Will had already finished cleaning up his mess and set up his dining table, that would be holding more than just his plate that night.

There was nothing to keep his mind and hands busy, he had made sure of that when he spent most of yesterday cleaning up his house. Putting away the few boxes; that were filled with either open case files or just mindless junk he hadn't bothered to put up around the house, in to one of his upstairs rooms to find company with several other boxes used for just the same task. He took everything that had to do with boat repair like the actual outboard motor, that he kept propped by his door. He would tinker with the part at night when he wasn't ready to go to bed or when his normal two finger drink of whiskey didn't sound appetizing enough. Into his workshop where it should have gone months ago, and finished the belated spring cleaning by taking his vacuum to every inch of his house. The perks of living with seven dogs, all with different coat types. He had nothing else to do other than just to wait for the chicken to be done and fight off the intrusive thought of it bursting into flames while it baked.

A soft knock followed by several large barks pulled Will from his thoughts and he turned towards his front door. *She's here already?* He thought as he pulled out his phone to check his text, that last notification from Miranda was she had just left her house and it shouldn't take her that long to arrive. Will gave one last look at the chicken; positive it wasn't going to suffer the same fate as Anakin Skywalker did near the end of *Revenge of The Sith*, before he walked out of the kitchen. Quick to hush his dogs with a hiss of his teeth and a heavy "Hey." His pack followed his orders and sat down struggling to battle with their energy. Will gave them one last pointed look. "Behave." Was all he said before opening his door.

Miranda stood on his porch with her hands held loosely behind her and a warm smile, "Hello Will," She greeted, "I brought you something." Her smile grew as she reviled what she was hiding, in her hands was a small rectangular black box that stood out against her burgundy peacoat.

"What's this?" Will asked as he took the box.

"It's a bottle of Glenmorangie Signet. You said you enjoyed the glass I gave you the other night, so I thought you might like your own." She smiled with a light shrug of her shoulders.

Will recalled how he had looked up the bottle when he got home the other night, thinking that rare thought of treating himself. He was quickly turned away when he noticed the price, of course he had the money to spend on the drink, he had come along ways from the scrawny kid who helped their dad work on boats, who often had to rely heavily on the days catch for a meal. But that didn't mean he felt comfortable with it, he could think of much more reasonable things to spend almost two hundred dollars on other than a bottle of whiskey.

Will opened his mouth to say something to her, that she didn't really have to bring him a bottle, but one of his dogs; his guess was Buster due to the higher pitch, let out an impatient bark. "Sorry, I should introduce you to my pack," Will sheepishly smiled as he held the door open more to make room for Miranda. "Please come in and thank you for whiskey you really didn't have too."

Miranda gave a polite nod, "You're welcome and don't think about it." She smiled and patted Will lightly on his cheek as she walked past Will into his house. "Why hello," Will knew that tone a voice all too well, the rise in pitch mixed with an over friendly tone, the I just met an adorable animal voice. Everyone had one even himself, everyone except Lecter, Will was positive that, that man was incapable of making such a voice change. But the idea of that the well held together doctor, might actually have one and what it could possibly sound like brought a small chuckle to his lips every time. "Aren't you guys just adorable." Miranda chimed as she knelt down to attempt to give as much attention to each one for the seven dogs as humanly possible. Watching Miranda with his dogs, Will felt something stir in his chest, it wasn't the fluttering blossom that often made itself known every time he was with the older woman, no this was something different. It was on the same wave length, yet it was lighter, more pristine. Something that only came out during rare occasions before being put away for another time. The feeling feathered under his skin and kissed at his emotions with mellow lips.

Will's attention refocused as Miranda stood up from the group of dogs, who had their fill of attention from the stranger and began to roam around. "Here let me take your coat." He promptly offered.

"Thank you," Miranda smiled as she slid off her coat and handed it to Will, "oh speaking of coats, I was going to bring back the jacket you lent me Friday, but it seems I've misplaced it." Miranda said as Will hung up her coat, he turned to her with a puzzled look when he was done.

"What do you mean?"

"Your jacket you left it at my house Friday," Miranda tilted her head, "didn't you?"

Will looked at her before turning back to the coat rack and rummaging through the articles of clothing that hung on it.

"You mean this one?" He asked as he held out the jacket in question. Miranda just stared at him with a slight perplexed look. "Yeah, I thought the same thing," Will scratched the back of his head with his index finger, "but actually I found it in my car Saturday when I went grocery shopping." He lightly shrugged with a dismissive smile.

“Hmmm, that’s odd because I could have sworn.” Miranda was caught off when a high buzz rang through the house.

“The chicken’s done,” Will said as he quickly walked past Miranda, before stopping, “hey don’t worry about. We all get out memories messed up now and again.” He smiled rubbing the side of her shoulders and Miranda returned her own uncertain smile, before Will walked back to the kitchen.

“I didn’t know you made your own fishing lures.” Miranda called out, while Will removed the chicken form the oven. He imagined her slowly walking around his work desk, her eyes roaming around all the small tools and the already finished lures that sat proudly amongst the rest, waiting to be used in the next trip.

“Uhm yeah,” Will answered as he began to prepare the side dish. Coating the red potatoes in olive oil and parmesan, “it helps clear my mind and keeps my hands busy.” *Along with reminding myself of who I really am and not those monsters I dress up as for a living.* He thought bitterly as he sprinkled a hand full of black pepper and salt onto the potatoes.

“Another interesting thing about you.”

If you to call desperately holding onto the remanence of your humanity interesting then go ahead.

“What will we be having tonight?” Miranda asked, her hands placed delicately in her lap as she watched Will walk into the dining room caring two steaming plates.

“Baked chicken drizzled in a maple and Worchester glaze with roasted parmesan potatoes.” Will answered as he set down her plate, before setting down his own right across from her. He watched as Miranda picked up her fork and began to move the food lightly around.

“It smells delicious,” She smiled before she took a bite and Will watched with a small swell of pride as she melted around the fork. “This chicken is amazing.” she praised and that swell erupted inside of him, before he began to cut into his own plate.

“Thanks, it’s a family recipe.” He said as he took a bite of his own food.

“I really mean it Will the flavor is wonderful, the rustic spices and the sweet yet savory glaze and to pair it with these potatoes. I must give my complements to the chef.” She smiled warmly and Will could feel his face heat up, unlike complements praise wasn’t so forging to him, but it was still an unfamiliar aspect. Will was used to only one form of the admiration, the praises he was given always happened when he had completed a case or solved a murder and they had grown cold to him now. At first, they use to do their job of feeling him with pride, made him proud of the accomplishments that he had done. Made it easier to look in the mirror when his mind rode the high that praise left it in. But after years of being used over and over again for one aspect of himself, realizing that he was only going to be seen as tool to be pulled out when the trail ran cold. The praise had lost its buzz, he could no longer feel that high, he had become immune to it. But when a praise did come his way that wasn’t laced around his empathy, he felt that old familiar soul lifting buzz and it felt good. A little misplaced, due to years of only being inject to one aspect of himself, but still just as good.

“I’m glad you like it so much.” He said with a small soft smile as he took another bite. *This must be what Lecter feels like whenever he has someone over, I can see why he does it so often.*

The two continued their meal in silence, the only sound was from forks hitting ceramic and the occasional sound from a dog either laying down or walking around. They knew better than to enter the dining room while they ate. Will stole glances over towards Miranda while they ate, the way the setting sun’s light drifted through the window and caressed her soften features had that feather like feeling reemerging each and every time. He wished he could place this new found feeling, he was just now getting over the blossom and now to throw this new emotion on top of it was a strange new experience.

“Dinner was amazing Will.” Miranda complemented as they stood outside on his porch, trying to say their goodbyes for the night. They had been attempting a goodbye for the past couple minutes. First standing in Will’s living room after they finished off a glass of Will’s gift and then it moved to them standing by the door while Will helped Miranda put on her coat. Now they stood on his porch, while the dogs got their nightly roam in. Miranda leaned into Will’s chest her arms loosely around him and Will had his arms around her. The two just stood there in one another’s embrace, softly swaying back and forth to the tune of rustling trees and the faint trickle of the creek. A goodbye hug turned into a hold of longing.

“Thanks, I don’t normally have people over for dinner,” Will admitted, “I tend to like my isolation.” He added. *Hence me living so far off the beaten path.*

“Well then, thanks for letting me be the exception.” Miranda softly said as she leaned back and placed a soft light kiss to Will’s lips.

That night’s sleep came easy for the profiler, as if his brain was rewarding him for lowing another barrier. A treat of a night’s rest where he wasn’t tortured with the images of dead bodies, skin drenched in hot sticky red and of him being the one at cause. Instead, he dreamt of a winding path in the woods with falling leaves crunching under his foot, his dogs running free by his side as he walked down the dirt path. The sun’s light breaking through the tree tops and a soft breeze wisping past him. He didn’t know where he was going as he walked and it felt relieving to not care. All this for acting socially normal.

A hard ring caused Will to jolt awake, it felt different to wake up so harshly from a phone call then it was from a nightmare. He took a ragged breath as he gathered himself and reached over to his night stand for his cell phone. As it continued to scream for his attention in the dark, Will threw a glance at his digital clock and let out a heavy sigh at the time.

Really five thirty in the god damn morning. Will didn’t need to look at the caller id to know who would be calling him at such a god-awful hour.

“Yes Jack.” Will said wincing at how rough his voice sounded from sleep.

“Another body has turned up; I need you down here right away.”

Chapter End Notes

What another cliff hanger!
But as a heads up, in the next chapter, Hannibal and Miranda will finally be meeting face to face. :)

A Bid For Your Attention

Chapter Summary

Another body is discovered.
A chance encounter happens
And Will is caught dead in the middle.

Chapter Notes

First off thank you all for the lovely and funny comments I read each and every one of them and I just want to say thank you all. I am so glad you guys love the fic so much :)

Second is just a warning, you see those m rated tags I have well two of those are coming to play in this chapter just as a heads up. Don't want to catch anyone off guard ya know.

Anyway read and enjoy ;)

The motel was horse shoe shaped with a fenced off pool that was closed for the season. That was planted in the middle of the seemingly empty parking lot. Only a few cars parked near the rooms and only a hand full of on lookers who dared to corrupt their sights with the chance to catch a glimpse of a real-life corps, a drastic shift to the first scene Will was called to. He figured the reason for the smaller crowd was due to the fact that this motel was father out from the major city limits. The rising sun only just started to scratch at the sky, adding warmth to the dark gradient that was the shifting night. The harsh orange bled into the deep blue as the stars still graced the sky with their presence before they were forced to disappear.

Will sat in his car for a few minutes, soaking in the constant heat that flowed from the heater as he mentally prepared himself. He knew what was going to be waiting for him as soon as he stepped out of his car. He also knew no matter how many mental stretching he did, he could never fully prepare himself to step back into the killer's mind. Over the years he thought he could get used to it, adapt to the aspect of himself. Yet every time he opened his mind and succumb to a murderers' design, he could feel himself closing back the wrong way. Like when a doctor would stitch up a gash, there were always the possibility of closing the wound wrong. The flesh might not close properly, the skin won't align right for the treatment, refuse to adhere, or the sutures might be too tight or too loose. Either way the injured skin would warn of tearing back open. It didn't help that Will kept reopening the injury, tearing the stiches over and over again, to the point that even if he could close the gash and take a needle and thread to it, the skin might no longer be able to close anymore. Threating to leave him to wonder around with a permanent lesion that kept on bleeding.

A rhythmic tapping brought him out of his thoughts with the second jolt of the morning. If he kept it up, he might die of a heart attack before dying at the hands of a ruthless killer or a brain aneurism, he could never make up his mind on how he sees himself going. Will shot who ever tapped at his window a glare, before softening his look when he realized it Beverley standing outside with a smirk.

“Come on Jack’s waiting.” Her voice muffled from the glass. Will took a deep breath and stepped out from his car.

“Jack talking to another manager?” Will asked as they slowly began to make their way to the crime scene, a small part of him was somewhat grateful that he didn’t have to climb a staircase to get to it. The air was still sharply cold, causing him to close his jacket as he walked across the parking lot.

“Yeah, it’s been decided that he’s the only one able to handle the amount of bull that these guys like to spew.”

“I don’t really see the point talking to them, they’re just going to say the same thing. About how the victim paid in cash, used a fake name, and the killer stood out of sight while it all happened.” Will mumbled as they grew closer to the crime scene, the yellow tape acting like an unwanted beacon.

“As long it keeps him from breathing down our necks, I don’t really care.” Beverly lightly smirked with a shrug of her shoulders.

“Fair point there.” Will agreed with a heavy sigh, they were only a few feet away now, he could see glimpses into the room. The edge of the queen-sized bed peeked through the opened door along with a bare foot that rested on top. He noticed Jimmy walking around the bed with a camera, no doubt snapping pictures of the corps while Zeller was probably further in the room. His view was suddenly cut off by Beverly, who held out her hand to stop him. Her palm just a few inches away from his chest, if he took another step they would be touching.

“I have to warn you,” She sighed, “Jack’s in an exceptionally pissy mood, this being the third body and all.” She said turning her head to the door and back to Will. “So, tread lightly.”

Tread lightly, that’s all Will felt like he ever did when it came to this job. If he shows too much emotion, he’s looked at with expressions that scratched at his skin, looks that teeter between pity and puzzlement. Yet if he doesn’t show enough, it’s judgmental glares that cut into his artery and bleed him dry. He was getting sick and tired of treading lightly, he wanted to just stomp around and not care what show he puts on. Teaching them that they shouldn’t look a gift horse in the mouth.

“Thanks for the heads up.” Will said sliding his hands in his jacket pocket and retrieving his glasses, Beverley gave him a simple smile and a nod before turning around and heading into the room first. Will gave one more look around his surroundings, this was one of the better no-tell motels out of the two previous crime scenes. It reminded him of the locations his dad would take him on those rare occasion when sleeping on a docked boat wasn’t an option. Waking up in a bed that didn’t sway up and down in the lake’s waves, to the sound of an

alarm clock going off and not an old gruffy man yelling about the amount he has to pay to dock his boat for the week. Those were a few times he felt normal growing up. It was sad how he could count those times on one hand. He took a deep breath, breathing in the slightly crisp air, capturing what untainted air felt like filling his lungs along with the light scent of his new cologne. Forming a second shield for his mind to crawl behind, he slid his glasses on and headed towards the room ready to tear his mind open.

The man was laid barren on the stiff bed, clammy skin coated in dried blood that hours before pumped through his veins. Bringing life to him up in tell his flesh was attacked by a foreign weapon and ripped open. Where he then watched as the very life suppling fluid flowed out of him, a dam that had a wrecking ball plow through it. Life literally slipping through his fingers. The victim's glassy eyes stared up at the celling, his mouth slightly opened in a permanent silent scream. This man was much larger than Eric or Llyod. It was hard to differentiate what was bloating; caused by death, or just rolls of fat when Will looked at the man. He stiffly walked closer to the body, besides his weight the second difference in this man was that he was bald, the only hair on his head was the stubble that grew around the base of his scalp. This man was much like Lloyd when it came to his appearance, deciding to just age with dignity. But by the look of the platinum wedding ring that cut deep in the sausage like appendage that was the only thing this man did with dignity.

Will pulled his eyes away from the body, before he could drown in the harsh red that decorated the naked man and up to the bed's headboard. *What message did you leave us this time.* Will thought as his eyes traveled up the light brown plywood wall and was met with the jagged word *Slut*. The sharper version of its sister word whore. He walked closer to the insult his eyes traveling the curve of the S and taking in the splinters that protruded from the wall. That's when he noticed something mixed in with the agitated wall. Will walked over to an investigation kit and pulled out a pair of gloves and made his way back over. He carefully brushed away some of the chips and noticed the dried blood that now infected the surface.

Should have known you'd use the same weapon to take these men's life to carve the insult into the wall. After killing these men, you still feel the high from the act, your skin is buzzing with adrenalin. You need to focus on what to do next, but you can't. You need to get it out of your system before you even try to attempt to rid the room of all the evidence you know we'll be looking for.

"The victim's name is Benedict Moore," Jimmy said, as he pulled out the man's driver's license from a long tan leather wallet, "he just turned fifty-two yesterday." He sighed heavily his face morphed in to a look of pity.

"Happy birthday to him," Zeller mumbled from where he was squatted by the nightstand, attempting to dust the room's phone for fingerprints. "I mean at least he went out with bang." He added while he chuckled lightly at his own joke.

"Really man." Beverley said dead panned as she walked over and took the wallet from Jimmy and put it in an evidence bag. "You better not let Jack hear you say things like that."

"Saying what Katz?" Jack interrupted as he entered the already small motel room and Will felt the room shrink. Beverly was right Will could see the anger and frustration spill off of the

bull of a man. It rushed off him in heavy dark waves that threaten to pull Will into it's current.

"Nothing." Beverly said as she handed the evidence bag back to Jimmy and went over to her kit that sat on the wooden drawer next to the once white now yellow stained microwave that had its door ajar. After years of use and neglect the basic kitchen appliance could no longer close and there was little chance that the motel would ever replace it. Jack watched her for a few seconds waiting to see if the more fearless of the three scientists would say something other than just the one word. But when she didn't; acting on her own advice, Jack's eyes went over to Will, and the profiler could see the anger that boiled behind the man's dark eyes. Anger that looked for an excuse to be released, that dared someone to take the wrong step and accidently open the cage door.

"Is this the work of The Black Widow?" Jack asked. Will looked away from the other man and back towards the body and then towards the wall, before jerkily nodding his head.

"Yes, this is her." Will answered, he felt her presence as soon as he walked through the door. It draped over him like a wet blanket; soaked in her psychopathic behavior, weighing him down. No matter how hard he tried the blanket clung to his skin and it felt like more weight would be added. Jack pinched the bridge of his nose and took a deep breath.

"We now have three bodies on our hands" He growled through gritted teeth, "and still no leads!" The anger was finding it's escape through Jack's voice.

"Did we ever roll out the idea that this woman could possibly be a prostitute," Zeller prompted as he stood up and stretched his back with a low groan. "I mean the shady motels that charge by the hour, the insulting words, it all kinda adds up in my opinion." He said with a shrug.

"If she's a prostitute than why would she leave the money?" Jimmy asked holding up the wallet.

"Because it would just point back to her occupation," Zeller answered, "make it a little too obvious. She lures these men in the promise of a paid night of fun and when they lower their guard." Zeller pointed back to the body with his thumb.

"She's not a prostitute." Will spoke up and everyone turned to look at him. His eyes were distant as he stared at nowhere in particular.

"And what makes you think that?" Zeller asked crossing his arms challenging the other man.

"Because, the men she kills would never go for a her if she was, they flaunt their wealth to others and brag about their rolls in society. They lived in a world where woman would throw themselves at them. Paying for sex would be an insult. She knew this so she became something that would lure them to her. She knows these men go after women who are easily charmed by the act they put on and she acts accordingly to suit their *taste*." Will began taking off his glasses and fidgeting with the temple, bending the piece of plastic between his hands. His eyes drifting around the room, taking in the light brown plywood walls, the clover green carpeted floor; that likely never been shampooed since the day it was installed, and the cheap

wooden chair with its torn upholstery that sat by the closet. It's sliding door barely hung onto the railing, one more pull and the door would mostly like come off.

"The motels that she takes these men too are just the first step in the humiliation process for her, get these men to a location that they would never be caught dead at, before she strips them down to nothing, but a blissful hazy mess of endorphins." Will answered as he put his glasses back on.

"Okay, then why the words?" Jimmy asked gesturing towards the carving and Will looked over and took a deep breath, his fist clenching and unclenching.

"Not fully sure yet," he breathed out, "she could possibly be angry with herself, upset that she has to give these men what they believed that they deserved from her in order to fulfill her end goal. She purposely has to degrade herself, force down her own narcissism into submission in order become something she clearly doesn't want to be. Afterwards when the kill is done and she slowly goes back to who she truly is, she can't handle what she had to turn herself into, so she lashes out." Will looked over to the wall. "Clearing her mind of the words that had been cut into her." His voice low and light before he turned back to Jimmy and just shrugged. Jimmy just stared at the man, processing what he was just told with a look a bewilderment.

"Hey you said the Moore here just turned fifty-two yesterday." Beverly spoke up.

"Yeah why?" Jimmy asked turning away from Will, blinking a few times.

"Well, I'm thinking that if Moore here was anything like Banks and Salazar."

"Then he must have thrown one hell of a party last night." Zeller jumped in and Beverly nodded in agreement.

"Meaning there could be a chance that during this party someone must have seen him interacting with our killer." Jimmy finished and everyone turned to look at Jack, the anger that was near boiling slowly reduced to a simmer as he took in the what the three just laid out in front of him.

"Alright now we might be getting somewhere," Jack mused as he tapped his index finger to his chin, "Zeller I want you to look into this suppose party, gather as much information as possible. If you think it's mundane it's not, I want everything. Katz how far are you on figuring out what the murder weapon is?" Beverly pushed at the side of cheek with her tongue lightly adjusting her weight from one hip to the other.

"I've eliminated all possibilities of the weapon being a knife or anything single bladed, the cut or I should be calling it a tear is too thick. My theory is we are looking for something that's double bladed, could be anything between pruning shears to a pair of kitchen scissors. Something sharp enough to be able to stab into the flesh and cut off the body parts. Whatever it could be it has to be small enough for her to be able to sneak it into the room."

Jack slowly nodded, as a new game plane formed into his head. "Price, I need you to go over Moore with a fine comb this might be the time that our Black Window finally missteps and

left something behind, after that help Katz with identifying the weapon. If needed I'll give a call to Doctor Lecter, he might be able to help. The man was a top-notch surgeon and with his time in the emergency room, he could have experience with double bladed wounds. Will," the profiler refocused himself with a slight shiver of his body. "I need you to continue to look into Salazar's, Banks' and now Moore's relationship history. For all we know this woman might still be a vengeful ex." Jack said before he began to exit the room, leaving the four to stand in the crime scene. Will could already feel his mind begin to stretch and threaten to tear, just at the thought of the hours it will take for him to try and profile each and every person on the seemingly never-ending list of suspects. He already felt exhausted and he hadn't even started yet.

"Man, it was tough looking into the victim's past relationships when it was the two of them, but to throw Moore's on the pile," Zeller let out a low whistle, "sucks to be you man." He all, but chuckled before Beverly gave him a rough one arm shove.

"Knock it off," She said, "at least he doesn't have to deal with a bunch of snobby rich people all trying to remember a drunken night of partying while battling a possible hangover," Beverly crossed her arms, "let's not forget you'll also have to break the news to Mrs. Moore. I wonder how she's going to take the news of her husband's death and infidelity." She said with a smirk and a slight tilt of her head and with that Will didn't feel so exhausted.

No, he still felt exhausted. Hours of him sitting at his desk staring at his laptop, screen littered with names of women who came forward. Who either willingly gave up their identity in order to prove that they didn't hold a grudge against these men or those who had to have their arm twisted with the threat of them going to jail for the crime or the relationship being leaked to the press. Either option was a dirty trick, but it surprised Will how many of the woman caved when the threat of public humiliation was brought up, instead of being labeled as a killer. And those were only some of the women, who knew how many still laid hidden under a sour break up or a pile of cash. The only time he was given some relief from the constant strain on his mind and eyes was when Beverly decided to grace him with her presences and give a small hand in sorting through the names. She claimed that there was only so much stab wound research she could take before the act of wielding a sharp object became a little too comfortable for her taste, that and she had sent Jimmy out to every hardware store in reach to collect more said sharp weapons. But Will knew the real reason the investigator made her way to his office and that was for more details into his and Miranda's relationship life. Which he found himself easily telling her while they attempted to tackle the long list of names.

"You should have seen Zeller's face when I told him about the lady you've been dating," Beverly smirked, "I never seen him so speechless, for a second I thought he swallowed his tongue." She laughed. Will knew he should have felt a little offended at the implication, but he understood the reaction. Will Graham world renown recluse of Jack's team of misfits, who needed personal space for his personal space managed to get himself a partner. Next thing you know Hannibal Lecter will be spotted at the local McDonalds; the world really must have gone upside down.

"I'm pretty sure his brain must have short circuited from shock," Will mumbled as he picked up his cup of coffee that was on the verge of being too cold to even consume. "Did sparks start coming out of his ears." Beverly let out a chuckle and playfully shoved his shoulder.

“Nah, but I’m pretty sure he needed to be rebooted after words,” Beverly said as she picked up her own cup of coffee, “anyway what are you and your lady friend up to now?” She asked raising up her cup to her lips. Will leaned back in his chair and felt relief when his back popped twice.

“She asked me to stop by her work today for lunch,” He rubbed the underside of his chin, “said she wants to talk about an up-and-coming event, along with something she wants to show me. Wouldn’t exactly tell me over the phone.” Beverly raised her eyebrow in intrigue.

“Thanks for coming by my office for lunch Will,” Miranda smiled as they walked off the elevator in to the workshop, “it’s sometimes hard to get away from all the work and I when I do I find myself thinking about all the work I might be missing while I eat.” Miranda explained while they strolled over to her office.

“I understand.” Will nodded as they passed Nichole’s work area, he noticed how the woman only looked up from a sewing mannequin; a sewing pin skillfully held between her now bright yellow lips, with hesitation drawn on her face. The designer gave Will a carful small wave, her eyes cautiously darting between him and her boss. *Once bitten twice as shy, you realized you over stepped last time during a moment when the air was light and joyful, when Miranda was just Miranda and not Miss Rhettford. How were you suppose to know she’d bare her fangs so quickly. You can’t make that mistake again, better keep your guard while the wound is still healing.* Will thought as the woman went back to work. “Sometimes it’s difficult to separate yourself from your work, I’ve been known to do that a lot. Just drag articles of my day at my job home with me, along to other places.” He mumbled last part to himself.

“I guess that’s one more thing we have in common,” Miranda lightly laughed, “we both can’t just walk away from our work, just can’t shut that part of ourself off no matter how hard we try.” She smiled as they walked up to a room made of glass walls. The only space in the whole upstairs that wasn’t opened to the rest of the floor.

All glass walls, so you can keep an eye on what is going on all the time. You want them to know even if you are not in their area, you still have the ability to watch over them. You just need to turn your head in one direction and they are in your sight. Constantly being supervised, under your thumb.

“Please come in.” Miranda said as she opened the door to her office and held it for Will to walk in. Unlike her home that was filled with whites and golds, her office was filled with silvers and blacks. The room was a perfect square, a sleek black desk sat in the middle of the room, with a computer monitor, a neat stack of different colored folders, and several oddly shaped paper weights on top. All that sat next to a silver name plate. With Miranda Rhettford etched into it in an elegant font. Near the right front corner of the office was a bean shaped low table with several fashion guides strewn on top. The table was pared with three black leather chairs, two on one side one on the other, Will assumed that was where Miranda would take her clients to sit and discuss further commission plans. A way to feel more intimate with her clients, be more open and not have them feeling like they are talking to someone with authority over them.

“But my inability to pull myself from my work isn’t the only reason I wanted you to stop by,” Miranda said while she walked over to the low table and took a seat at the lonely chair and Will took a seat at one of the two chairs on the opposite side of the table. “You see there is an art auction coming up this Friday,” Miranda spoke slowly almost coy as she loosely ran her fingers over the arm of the chair. “And I was given an invite to attend and this invite has a plus one attached to it.” She flashed Will a smile and Will just swallowed thickly. It was no secret that Will did not care for large gathering events, he avoided those like the plague. He hated the way a large group of people were crammed together in a tight room, bodies pressed close causing the already stuffy area to grow more suffocating, the multiple voices tearing into his eardrums, and the unbearable expectation to be less socially awkward.

“I don’t know Miranda,” Will began he could already see that smile she had flicker, “I don’t really care for social events. I honestly detest them all together, I only attend things like that because I’m either giving a presentation or it’s some other mandatory reason. Other than that, it’s just not my brand of whiskey.” Will spoke, no longer looking at her, but out the window into the vast horizon of the outside world. “I’m sorry.” He added to help ease the blunt truth, as he finally looked back at her and he noticed that Miranda was battling to keep her smile.

“I understand that this might not be your kind of event Will, trust me I do a lot of people don’t like the idea of being in a room with a bunch of strangers that you’ll never see again all trying to come off as your friend while they crowd around you and you feel like you can’t blink without someone breathing down you neck,” Miranda began as she reached over and placed her hand on his, “but this will mean so much to me if you’d go. I always hated going to these kinds of events alone and I start to feel so awkward mingling with couples, I sometimes feel like they are secretly judging me for attending without someone on my arm.”

“You felling awkward, I highly doubt that.” Will knew that was lie she had told him; Miranda was the type of person who never cared what other’s thought of her. If someone did bring up the lack of date, or her relationship statues, she’d wear the truth with her head held high. So, no Miranda never felt awkward. He honestly felt a sharp pinch of irritation towards her for thinking he would fall so easily for the lie and attempt at a guilt trip.

“Okay so I don’t feel awkward when it comes to talking with couples,” Miranda dry chuckled her head ducking slightly, “But I do hate going to these events by myself, wading through long drawn-out conversations with people I only ever meet during social events, who call themselves my friends when in reality they are just associates. All while sipping at a glass of whatever beverage they decided to serve with the world’s fakest smile plastered on my face. Monitoring the time trying to calculate when it would be socially acceptable to leave.” Will felt her squeeze his hand.

“Miranda, I understand what you mean, but those types of gatherings are just not for.”

“Before you finish that thought,” Miranda maneuvered her hand to where their hands were interlocked. She stood up, practically pulled Will up along with her and began to walk out of her office pulling Will along. “There is something I’ve been dying to show you.” Not giving Will much room to work with, while she led him out of the office, passed the table of computers, passed Nichole, and finally stopping at a new area.

The location had several full-length mirrors that stood tall, placed statistically for those who stood in the center could take in all of their reflection. Able to catch each and every angle of themselves, nothing hidden from them. In the center of the mirrors gaze was a black round pedestal and on top of said pedestal was one of the many sewing mannequins. But unlike those this one was sporting a very charming waistcoat. Miranda let go of Will's hand and made her way over to the mannequin, her fingers lightly trailing over its shoulder and stopping right behind it.

Will walked from his spot and took in the article of clothing as a whole. The way the fog grey fabric wrapped around the inanimate object in a soft hold, an insinuation of what it might look like on a breathing body. His eyes swam around the sea of gray and waded at the charcoal embroidery that encased the waistcoat. Resembling branches from a leaf baren tree, starting at the bottom hem and clawing its way up the body in vine like pattern of movements. Before abruptly stopping right at the chest.

"What do you think Will?" Miranda asked as she placed her hands on both of the mannequin's shoulders.

"It's very appealing." Will said as his finger traced over the raised thread, running along one of the branches until it ended at a similar colored button. The shined button effortlessly captured Will's reflection in its dark pigment.

"I'm glad you like it," Miranda walked around from behind the mannequin and to Will's side. Will turned his attention away from the waistcoat and towards Miranda, his hand never leaving the piece of clothing. "Because it's yours, I want you to wear it at the art auction." She smiled her hands held together in front of her.

"You're trying to bribe me now," Will lightly chuckled, "first guilt tripping, now trying to buy me off with one of your own handmade pieces of clothing. Really?" He raised an eyebrow. Miranda shrugged playfully.

"Guilty as charge," She stepped closer to him, "Please Will I would really, really, really" her hands slid up his chest and her arms hung loosely around his neck. Will knew what she was doing, he seen it coming as soon as Miranda moved to his side after asking him what his opinion on the waistcoat was. But that didn't stop the light tingles from casting over his skin or the flutter in his chest. "Love it if you would attend with me." Miranda whispered into his ear sealed with a tender kiss to his cheek, one followed by another followed by one more. Before she leaned back and captured his eyes and he knew that look, living with dogs half his life he could identify the puppy dog eyes from a mile away and he liked to believe that he was immune to the stare. Will let out a heavy sigh.

"Miranda though the waistcoat is very nice and I would like to wear it someday," Will began, but Miranda leaned in and pressed another kiss this time on his lips.

God where is my will power? Will thought as he tried to focus on what that auction might hold for him. A bunch of snobby art enthusiasts ready to correct anyone who dared speak their mind about a piece, stuffed like sardines for hours while they play nice with one another before gathering around to bid for a piece of art, there the once friendly demeaner will turn cold as they arm their wallets. Ready to spend an obscure amount of money that could help

payoff someone's student loan. Could he really sit through all that? *Am I going to cave that easily because Miranda tried to guilt trip me first then by me off and now trying to butter me up. I don't think so.* Will thought as he refocused himself, he leaned slowly back and opened his mouth to speak, but Miranda interjected.

"Please Will," She kissed him a second time, "for me." Her voice was barely an octave above a whisper and it was laced thick with sweet honey.

Will power Graham, hold you ground think about those fancy clade folks throwing judgmental stares at you, with their noses turned up. They'll know you don't belong amongst them. Even with Miranda at your side, she belongs with them not you! He thought bitterly to himself, but then he looked back at Miranda with a soft almost pleading look on her face. *But it'll be for her though, she has her heart set on you going with her, or she wouldn't have tried so many attempts to get you to say yes. Plus, that's the thing you do in a standard relationship, putting aside your own comforts for the other.* Will let out a sigh in defeat and looked down at the ground.

"Alright I'll go." He said with a tight smile and a nod of his head and he felt the excitement burst off of Miranda in the manner of seconds.

"Thank you so much." She beamed as she leaned forward and captured Will in a long appreciation filled kiss. The sudden kiss had Will take a slight step back to rebalance himself, he even reached out to clutch at the mannequin for support. "You won't regret it, I promise." Miranda smiled as they pulled apart.

I hope you're right.

"First though I'll need to take you measurements, so we can get you fitted for."

"Miss Rhettford." Miranda was cut off by a familiar mouse like voice and the two turned to see Brittney clutching her tablet, she had a panic look on her face and a few strands of hair were loose; to help emphasized her emotion.

"Brittney I'm a bit preoccupied at the moment." Miranda said as she straightened herself and once more Will was taken back how quickly she could just switch personas.

"I know and I am greatly sorry, but it's Mister Kramer, he umm."

"Brittney please. Out with it."

"Right sorry, he's been calling for the past half an hour, wanting to discuss the progress about the suit he commissioned last week." Brittney managed to spit out.

"Brittney you could have informed him that the suit was going to take two to three months. The schedule is in his folder, after the designing process comes the measurements, followed by actually."

"I understand Miss Rhettford, and I tried to tell him this several times. But Mister Kramer wants to talk to you about it." Brittney explained, "I'm sorry he just won't listen to me." Her

voice was wavey and high pitched as she tried to justify her reasoning. Which Will understood, some people would rather talk to the person in charge than someone beneath them. Miranda let out a frustrated breath and pinched the bridge of her nose.

“Alright I understand, forward his call to my office phone. I’ll go see what he needs to discuss.” Miranda turned over to Will. “This will only take a moment, then” She lightly took hold of the hems of his jacket and played with the edges of the fabric, “we’ll get those measurements.” She winked before turning away and briskly walking towards her office, leaving Will and Brittney alone as the sound of clacking high heels faded from their ears. Will turned back to the waistcoat, that soon would be fitted for him and resumed to trace over the embroidery, the rough prominent threads that dared to catch his thumbnail as he followed its path. Already able to imagine what the article of clothing will look like on him.

“I wouldn’t get too comfortable.” A sudden small voice spoke, catching Will’s attention.

“What?” Will asked his face scrunched in confusion as he turned away from the waistcoat and towards Brittney. Who wasn’t even facing him, still looking in the same direction Miranda had left in.

“I wouldn’t get too comfortable with Miranda,” the assistant restated, just barely looking over her shoulder towards Will. “She has a very bad habit with the men she dates,” Brittney turned towards Will her face blank. “Miranda likes to drag men along for a while, shower them with gifts, and gets them hooked on her until she grows bored of them. Before they know it they are receiving a text late at night explaining how they are no longer compatible and how she doesn’t see the relationship going anywhere any time soon.” Brittney said as fidgeted with her tablet waiting for Will to say something, but he just kept his mouth shut.

Brittney took a deep breath, obvious that she was battling with her anxiety. “I’m just trying to warn you that’s all. Even if you are the longest man, she has kept around I wouldn’t keep that into consideration,” Will watched as she gathered the loose strands of hair and tucked them behind her ears, “just don’t be surprised when one of these days Miranda sends you a text then blocks your number before you get to say your peace. I’ve seen it happen so many times and I was also ordered to send some of those texts. The only serous relationship Miranda has is the one with her own career. So here is your warning Will. Don’t get comfortable.” She finished before quickly turning on her heels and walking away, to go stand at Miranda’s side like a good little lap dog.

The wolf’s body contorted, his large muscles bulging under his thick coarse black fur, as the enormous beast struggled under the hold of the elegant gold chains that bind him to the jagged rocks. His large maw opened wide, sharp blood-stained teeth snapping at the air. While he fought a losing battle yet, the beast refused to give in to his endless fate of fighting for freedom. A perfectly captured struggle in deep cool brush strokes, the dark grey and blues that made up the thundering sky as if the heavens in the painting were sharing the same emotion as the creature.

The art piece had caught Will’s eye from the ever-expanding sea of people. Beaconing him towards it, guiding him through the groups of strangers. Who stood around in small collections exchanging pleasantries with one another, all while barely paying attention to the soul reason they were gathered in the area in the first place. But just because there was a

reason for them to come together in public didn't mean they needed to pay said reason any mind.

At first all Will could feel were the nerves buzzing under his skin, like a million fire ants skittering along his veins just waiting for someone to come by and disturb them. To give them the right or wrong reason to become riled up. He watched standing by the side of Miranda's Roll Royce as well-dressed couple after well-dressed couple walked up the wide steps to the large building. He battled to keep the negative thoughts at bay. How they pointed out how crowded it must be inside and how exhausting it's going to be to play nice for who knows how long. Once in a while he would send a glance over to Miranda, who was talking to the valet and for a moment he felt at ease with just taking in her appearance.

Miranda wore a cream sheer floor length dress with sleeves and the right amount of hidden jewels sewn into it, that caught the lights in a subtle manor. But the jewels were not what made the dress so eye catching. It was the red that was thrown into the off-white fabric, that pooled at the bottom and ascended upward in a liquid like movement. As if someone was slowly spilling wine into a body of water, the red made its way up her dress before disappearing just past her midsection. If he wasn't looking at her dress, it was her hair and how it flowed down her shoulders and stopped at the open back. Along with the ruby pendent hairclip that nestled in the back of her head. When Will had first seen her, the only thing he could tell her was how breath taking she looked and in return she had paid him with a flattered laugh paired with his own complement of being strikingly handsome. But even though she was captivating to his eyes, he still found himself falling back into his thoughts.

Will was brought out of his internal battle when Miranda gingerly wrapped her arm around his and gave him a warm joyful smile, along with a second reassurance on how much they'll enjoy tonight. Will felt that warmth from her smile seep into his chest and the red ants slowly began to ease their movements.

The inside of the auction house wasn't as cramped as Will initially thought it to be. It's high dome ceiling, walls with large windows that gave view to the night, and evenly placed art pieces; which had people spaced apart, had made the location feel less confining to him. The constant orchestra music coming from the live band held the atmosphere to the standers that these people were accustom to. It also caused a movement in the air, in order to keep the surroundings from falling stagnate.

As they moved around the main area where the auction pieces stood, for future bidders to have a closer view on what they might be battling for. The two made their way from group to group, now and then stopping to say the standard 'hellos' and 'how have you been', with a few 'we'll have to keep in touch soon' in order to keep things fresh. Only stopping at a few selected occupants, who needed more than the average exchange of polite greetings. With those Miranda would label them as either past clients, or as those who assumed were her close friends. When in reality the closes thing they did as friends was send the occasional Christmas card.

They did this dance for what felt like over two hours, but when Will glanced at his watch reality told him that it was only going on for just around thirty minutes. Their dance of light social interaction was brought to a halt when Miranda was spotted by a woman, dressed in a

black off the shoulder dress with a white trim, with a thick pearl neckless held tight around her neck, and a bobbed haircut. The woman; who looked to be older than both Will and Miranda, easily waved them over to her group and claimed to be one of Miranda's close friends. By the look on Miranda's face when she focused her attention on the other, told Will that the stranger might be right.

"Charlette, it's so good to see you." Miranda greeted her voice a touch high as the two closed the distance lightly clasping onto one another arms, in an odd spacious hug. That might not even be considered a hug, but more of an arm hold.

"I know Miranda it's been far too long." Charlette spoke as they let go of one another arms and just stared at each other, taking in the others presence. Before the other woman's attention focused on Will. "And who is this handsome young man you have on your arm?" The smile Charlette had sent Will was just one the verge of predatory and it had him feeling that uncomfortable prickle under his skin. If he had worn a tie, he would have tried to loosen the fabric's hold around his neck. He was somewhat thankful he chose not to add the accessory with his outfit.

"Oh, how rude of me," Miranda clasped her hands together, "Charlette this is Will Graham," Miranda turned to Will, "Will this is Charlette Winder. We met a while back when I was in Tokyo for the cherry blossom festival." Miranda smiled as she stepped a little to the side to initiate for the two to exchange greetings.

"What a pleasure it is to meet you Mister Graham." Charlette purred as she took a step forward, Will fought the urge to take a step back or to scrunch his nose at the abrasive flowery perfume that rolled off the woman and mixed poorly with the smell of cigarette smoke that also tainted her skin.

"It's a pleasure as well Miss Winder." Will forced a smile and hoped it could pass as authentic and focused his attention on her left pearl earring. Instead of those hungry eyes that desperately sought out his own.

"Please call me Charlette," She said placing a hand on her chest, "everyone I know does." She said as she motioned to the rest of the group.

"Alright, Charlette." Will cringed inwardly, but bowed his head slightly with another fake smile. The woman let out a over exaggerated laugh. Making Will wonder what he could have said that would cause such an outburst. He looked over at Miranda for an answer, but it seemed she was just as lost on the reaction as he was, even given him a shrug to prove her own reaction.

Now that the exchange was over with Charlette was set on not letting either one of them leave her group. Though she focused more attention on keeping Miranda involved in the group's conversation, leaving Will to just stand there not really drawn into the endless conversations that focused on either out of country trips or other lavishing activities that barely held his interest. If anything, it started to seem like they were all trying to one up one another. To see who spent the most money doing the most extraordinary activities. One could only listen to someone basically brag about the large extravagant party they held on their

million-dollar yacht for so long until the idea of ripping one's ears out became a little too tempting.

Leaving Will's eyes to wonder around the room, skipping over body after body as the conversations became a mumble of voices in his head. While he searched for something to help keep his mind occupied. That's when he spotted the wolf, just across the room. Calling out to his wondering mind and promising him something to focus on; other than the irritating tells of wealth that tried to make its way into his skull. Without even bothering to try and interject the heavy conversation Will just found himself walking over to the painting. A moth to a flame.

"I'm guessing I won't need to ask you what you see when looking at this piece of art huh." Miranda lightly laughed drawing Will's attention, his eye leaving the painting in favor of looking at her.

I wondered how long it take you to join me. He thought to himself. *Did I give you a perfect opportunity to leave Charlette and her endless stories about her trips around Europe. I'd seen that look in your eyes, while she droned on and on about the white sandy beaches she strolled down with her latest fling. You were just as uninterested as I was.*

"No, I guess you won't have to." He returned the light laugh with his own, his hands sliding into his pockets. As his eyes traveled back to the art work, following one of the serpent like chains that constricted around the wolf's front leg, his razor like claws dug deep groves into the harsh land.

"But that doesn't mean I wouldn't mind to hear your thoughts on it," She smiled, "because if I'm being honest, I don't quite understand what the meaning behind it is." Miranda said as she moved closer to Will's side and wrapped her arm around his. "All I see is a poor wolf being chained down." Miranda tilted her head; Will looked over and noticed how her face held a soft look of pity for the painted animal.

"If I remember my Norse mythology and it has been a while," Will chuckled lightly, "this painting is about."

"The Binding of Fenrir." A familiar rich voice cut in and Will felt a cool wave travel down the curve of his spine. Will turned his attention from Miranda and over to the owner of the voice, a part of him in full denial, the other wasn't at all surprised to see the polished doctor standing by them, arms loosely held behind his back. Dressed in an all-black suit with a golden silk floral waistcoat paired with a tie and pocket square to match. Will already thought the man dressed well; he was one of the few people known to mankind who could pull off an all-plaid suit after all, the currant outfit Hannibal was in only fed his thoughts. The man looked sticking. "Hello Will," Hannibal smiled softly, "I was not expecting to run into you here."

"Uh yeah, I don't really blame you there." Will awkwardly chuckled, the ability to talk suddenly lost on him as he tried to sew together a sentence explaining this odd occurrence. Seeing Will Graham attend a crowded art auction full of rich people would be like spotting a jackalope in the woods behind his house not impossible, but highly unlikely.

"Will." A soft voice spoke followed by a gentle pressure to his arm. Giving Will all he needed to gather himself and initiate the introduction.

"Oh right," Will smiled, "Miranda this is Doctor Hannibal Lecter, Doctor Lecter this Miranda Rhettford." Will's voice was on the edge of being considered fast, his ability to sew finally came back to him and it burst out of him like a broken damn. As though if he stopped in the middle of the sentence, he might not be able to find his voice again.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Doctor Lecter." Miranda smiled.

"As it is for me," Hannibal slightly bowed his head, "Will has spoken very fondly of you." He smiled as he casted Will a sly look and Will felt a harsh heat creep up his neck.

"Oh, Will talks about me, no wonder I felt my ears burning the other day." Miranda laughed, which Hannibal slightly played into and Will gave his own nerve filled chuckle as he tried to cope with the fact that two sides of his world was coming together. "How do you two know each other, if you don't mind me asking, Will could tell you I am a very curious person." Miranda spoke as she lightly squeezed his arm and looked back and forth from one another.

Crap! What do I tell her? Lecter's my not therapist who I vent to about how fucked up my mental health is and on the side lines we sometimes solve murders together. Yeah, that'll go as well as a led balloon.

"Will and I are friends and colleagues, I often assist Will along with the rest of the Behavioral Analysis Unit with some of their cases and when that's not taking place Will and I often have very intellectually stimulated conversations about our lives. Like *friends* do." Hannibal answered and for a split-second Will felt a relief flush over his nerves that was until.

"I didn't know you help the FBI with their cases, I thought you just taught the new recruits." The once promising feel of relief was taken from him. Now he was faced with harsh scramble to find the right way to explain why he kept that part of his life from her.

So, you never told your dear Miranda about your full involvement with Jack and the rest of his team. Never let her know about how you submerge yourself into blood drenched murders on almost a daily bases, to the point where you risk losing yourself. Only letting her see the part of you that you blind yourself into believing is the real you. Oh, Will how deceitful of you; I'm almost proud. Hannibal thought as he watched Will struggle. *Sorry my dear boy, I won't be saving you from this uncomfortable situation. Maybe next time you'll let me know about your little excursion into the formal world of art.*

"I'm sorry I never told you." Will breathed out, "It's sort of a new development to my job, kinda like an add on," Will said as he tried to battle the bites of the once rested fire ants. "I've only been helping the BAU for a short while, they made me an honorary special agent. Before that it was just strictly teaching." He finally answered as he prayed to any god that, that might settle Miranda's curiosity and not have her be mad at him for keeping that part of his life private.

"How interesting to know that," Miranda said and that relief that played at Will like the tide finally came back to him, "I should have known there must have been more to you than you

like to let on." She smiled and playfully bumped him. "We all have our reasons to keep parts of ourselves private. I mean I'm no exception there are somethings I have hidden in my closest." Miranda added and Will felt that relief settle and the fire ants be drowned by it. It also reminded Will that Miranda never dug around inside his mind, if he gave her an answer, she was pleased with it.

"I must agree with you on that notion Miss Rhettford, some parts are best hidden from public view." Hannibal spoke, "Though I wouldn't considered leaving out one's full occupation one of them." Hannibal smirked and Will began to list places to hide a body and who might be a willing participant in helping him with task; his money was on Beverley.

"Well, you might be correct Doctor Lecter, but if Will wasn't comfortable telling me that part of his life just yet I completely understand." Miranda said as she looked over at Will with a soft smile, that had the warmth in his chest glow lightly, and Hannibal laid witness to what Alana had told him in his office. He watched the features in Will's face soften, the struggle for reason gone, and the profiler looked as though a weight had been lifted from him. Will was looking at Miranda as though he wasn't even there with them. It sickened him to the core.

"I assume Will has probably mentioned that I wasn't completely comfortable telling him what I did for a living at first." Miranda returned her attention back to Hannibal. "So, I deeply understand the hesitation on his part. Being comfortable enough with someone to open up fully takes time." The smile Miranda gave Hannibal was something Will had never seen her make before. It was hard almost stone cold without being fully blatant. Before the conversation could continue the three were interrupted, by Charlette.

"Miranda this is where you wondered off too," the woman chimed as she walked over and wrapped her fingers around Miranda's arm, not paying attention to the other two, "you must come and listen to this story about how Joshua nearly got thrown into jail while in Spain. It's just hilarious." Charlette said nearly lost in a fit of giggles as she tried to coax Miranda back to her group. Before Miranda could give her response on actually going with her, Charlette was already pulling her away. Leaving Will and Hannibal in front of the art work.

At first Hannibal was taken back when he had spotted Will for the first time that night. Even slipping into the comfortable sea of denial, coming up with the conclusion that he just spotted someone that looked eerily similar to the younger man. There was no reason that Will would ever attend an art auction. But as he watched this possible look alike with scrutinizing eyes, the denial slowly washed away and was replaced with stunned realization. It was indeed Will Graham standing amongst groups of socialites. Realization wasn't the only emotion he felt as he laid eyes upon the profiler, Hannibal also felt that foreign feeling of astonishment.

The way Will had presented himself to the others, would have someone believing that he belonged amongst them. Hannibal had grown accustomed to seeing Will in outfits that played into his blue-collard nature, but what he had on was something so unexpected of the younger man. The professionally tailored waistcoat, that accentuated the exquisite figure that always laid hidden under his loose-fitting clothes was captivating. The greys in the waistcoat paired well with teal dress shirt and the combination would no doubt bring out Will's already memorizing eyes that reminded Hannibal of a fresh storm that threaten to disturb a peaceful

ocean. Besides the suit Hannibal also noticed how Will had managed to tame his unruly curls, transforming his mane of mocha into lush waves; the want to run his hands through and ruin those waves was unmatched. Hannibal craved to see Will up close, there was hunger building inside him that wouldn't be satisfied until he was in the others presence and to take all of him in. He needed to take in all of Will to appreciate what he had transformed himself into, he also needed answers. To demand to know what the other was doing here in the first place.

But he couldn't just walk up to the group, no that would be something some typical person would do and Hannibal was above that. No, he would wait and stalk until he found the appropriate time to strike. Which came sooner than he expected, after Will was pulled into a group of people and Hannibal watched as Will slowly began to drift out of whatever conversation that was happening.

What's wrong Will, finding it hard to keep your mind stimulated amongst these people. They can't hold your interest like I can. Now you have to try to look for something that'll feed that starving mind of yours. Hannibal thought as he watched Will's eyes wonder around the room and a part of him hopped that they would land on him. But instead, they were caught by something else and Hannibal watched as Will left the group. Giving him the perfect time to strike. How he cherished the image that appeared in his mind of Will going from stunned from running into him to guilt for not letting him know about his act of attending such an event. It was going to be beautiful. That all came to an unexpected halt when Miranda had joined Will by the painting taking place at his side, a place Hannibal wanted to fill. Hannibal stopped for a moment, thrown off from the path that he had carved for himself to take. He had noticed Miranda earlier while keeping an eye on Will, once again glued to his side leading him around the area, as if showing him off for the rest to take in. And Hannibal felt the inky tar boil inside him, filling his lungs and infecting his thoughts. He wanted to be the one to lead Will around the many groups, to have his arm around the man's tempting waist, presenting him to the others, and watch as they felt a wave of envy for the two. Instead, he was punished with watching it happen from the outsider's point of view, but he wasn't going to let that stop him. He just had to adjust his approach and plan from there, one of the upsides to this sudden unexpected surprise was now he had the chance to officially meet Miranda.

"I'm sorry for not telling you about coming here tonight," Will spoke, "I've been preoccupied with the case and I was basically in full denial about coming here ever since Miranda asked me to join her." Will said, but Hannibal seemed to be paying no mind to his attempt at an apology; an apology Will really did not need to give, but for some odd reason he felt like it was warranted none the less. Hannibal had focused his attention to the painting they were standing in front of. As if to say how he had no interest in what the other had to tell him.

"The Binding of Fenrir, a tale of fear and betrayal." Hannibal spoke not even acknowledging Will's apology. Will watched as Hannibal's eyes flickered around the painting, face completely blank, Will turned his attention to the painting as well.

"Condemned from birth by a prophecy, born with the gift of immense strength that could only be interpreted as evidence of the evil that must be lurking inside," Will said as he took in the painting once more. "To then be double crossed by those trusted and left to rot away waiting for the day where vengeance can be administrated." Lost in the heavy brush strokes

and the retailing of the tale, Will didn't noticed how Hannibal had moved his focus away from the paining and towards him.

"Do you fear the same fate might be what awaits you Will?" Hannibal asked, while Will's focused still lingered on the wolf. "That your gift might be seen as something that comes from a place of evil and that one day those you trust might end up betraying you?"

Will let out a sardonic laugh as he took a step back from the painting and turning towards Hannibal. "I fear that you might be reading too much of what one Freddie Lounds is posting online about me." He answered with enough venom in his words that reminded Hannibal of how sharp Will's tongue could get when he was provoked. How Hannibal enjoyed causing that side of him to come out, the way Will's eyes would darken and his posture would stiffen. To watch the shift was to catch a glimpse of that creature that Will liked to hold at bay and keep hidden from outsiders. Only letting it come out to play when he was in need to send those who aggravated him a warning into what he was capable of with just words alone.

"Though I do find what Miss Lounds post on her website not at all intriguing and how she chooses to paint you with her words unsavory. That is not what I meant, I simply meant." Hannibal was cut off when Will's body suddenly lurched forward, the younger man stubbled to catch his footing as he tried to angle his body so he wouldn't crash into the doctor. But Hannibal reached out and quickly caught Will, with his hand on his chest and the other tightly gripping his forearm. Easily stopping Will from crashing into the ground. Hannibal casted a look to see what could have possibly caused the sudden stumble, only to see a man in a very basic suit rush by as if he hadn't just crashed into someone. *How considerably rude.* Hannibal thought as he turned his eyes from the man; who features he was etching onto his mind, that cut through the groups of people, before he felt a hand grip his own forearm for support bringing his attention back down the man he still held in his arms. With his eyes blown wide from the sudden shock and breath a tad bit labored. Hannibal fought off the thought of seeing Will remaking that look in a more *favorable* way.

"You alright Will?" Hannibal asked as he helped the other straighten up. "It was very inconsiderate of the man to not stop and apologies don't you think." Hannibal added, but Will was no longer present, his mind threating to drown into a whirlwind of jumbled thoughts. Trying to catch itself from the sudden invasion of being rudely ran into, to the large warm hand splayed on his chest with the other one holding his forearm as if he might slip through his fingers like water. The hands lingered for the right amount of time and had his body sending out an odd reaction to his brain. Something was flicking under his chest right where Hannibal's hand was, but Will couldn't place what this flicker was and it was uncomfortable for him. He liked to know what this abnormal sensation was and why it decided now would be the best time to appear.

"Will?" That smooth voice broke though the scramble of his thoughts and brought him whirling back into the present. Will swallowed the hard lump in his throat as he took over and continued to straightened himself out.

"Um sorry about that." Will sheepishly said as he let go of the older man in favor of attempting to regain control of his body. Hannibal gave him a reassuring smile with a huff of a laugh to match and let go of Will's arm letting his other hand fall from his chest. Fighting

off that dark possessive part of himself that wanted him to keep a tight steel hold on Will's body and cage it to his side for the rest of time. Instead, he just basked in the sight of Will trying to reground himself, running his hands over his waistcoat and over the side of his hair. Putting the curls back in line. Already missing the disheveled look that he grew a taste for over their time together, ideas of brining that appearance back already fluttered through his mind.

"It's quite alright, it wasn't your fault that someone decided you weren't worth their time to simply walk around." Hannibal said and Will let out an unsteady chuckle and a nod of his head.

"Fair point there."

"Will," Miranda said as she rejoined them holding two bidding paddles in her hand, the other reaching out to his hand and Will instinctively went out to hold it. His frazzle nerves subsiding in the warmth the hold offered out. "The auction is about to start; let's go take out seats." She smiled.

"Alright," Will smiled and turned back to Hannibal, "we have to go Doctor Lecter, I hope you find something worth fighting over." Will said with a chuckle before Miranda gave her own nod of goodbye before they parted off.

Oh, I already have my dear Will.

For such a high-priced auction, the chairs were a nightmare to sit in. They were hard and uncomfortable, causing Will to shift his weight several times as he tried not focus on how packed the room was. The only saving grace was when they dimmed the lights in order to draw all the attention to the stage, where the reasons for the gathering would be put on displayed. Laid out in front of the hungry crowd, waiting for the war of wealth to start and the champion to claim their prize. Even though Miranda had given him a paddle to hold up when he spotted something worth his money. Will did not plan to join in the battle anytime soon, he was much more comfortable in watching what could possibly happen rather than participate.

"And next we have this lovely piece painted by one Auston Campos inspired from the old Norse tale of Fenrir titled The Battle Against Betrayal." The auctioneer proclaimed as the painting was brought on stage. "May the bidding start at one thousand dollars." The man called and the room did not budge. No one's paddles were risen, no money being thrown, no enemies to be made, nothing.

"I feel bad," Will whispered over to Miranda, who let out a hum in response, "It is a nice painting."

"You like it?" Miranda asked with a tilt of her head and Will just shrugged.

"Yeah, I guess I do," He smiled, "if it was less than a thousand dollars I'd actually try and place a bid." Will said as rubbed the underside of his jaw. Missing the gleam in Miranda's eyes.

“Well then why didn’t you say so.” Miranda purred as she gave Will a sly smile and without looking away raised her paddle.

“And we have are first bid for a thousand can we get fifteen hundred!”

“Miranda no.” Will said shocked at what she just did and Miranda just shrugged, her smile still wicked.

“Too late.” She sung. “Just let it happen.” She added placing a hand on the side of his face and leaning over to plant a chaste kiss on his lips.

“And we have fifteen hundred can we get two!”

Miranda snapped her head away from Will and towards who ever dared to bid against her, eyes tearing through the sea of people. Catching the assaulting paddle subtly held up by one Hannibal Lecter, who sat a few rows back on the outside of the row. Out of Will’s view, but not of hers, their eyes met and the dance had begun. Miranda rose her paddle without breaking contact and Hannibal felt the edge of his lips twitch upwards, oh how he loved a good fight.

“We have two do we have twenty-five hundred!”

And Hannibal’s paddle went up and just like the confrontation between the two opposing paddles the price for the wolf kept rising. No one in the room dared to break in to the bidding war, all engrossed to see who might come out on top. It was one thing when it was a large number of bidders fighting for a piece, but when it was a one v one things change. It was as if there was an unspoken rule amongst them at play and no one dared to cross it.

Just as the painting of the wolf reached double-digit territory, climbing close to ten thousand dollars. Will’s nerves were running far too high for him to handle. He already felt uncomfortable when Miranda wanted to spend hundreds on him and with her wanting to spend a thousand had made it morph into something beyond that. But now it was madding to him with how easily Miranda was willing to go with spending fifteen thousand dollars on a piece of art work he mentioned liking. He needed to put a stop to this for his own sanity. When Miranda went to raise her arm, Will immediately moved his hand on top of hers. Miranda quickly turned to look down at the hand, as if Will was a stranger than up to him and her face softened.

“Miranda *please*.” Was all Will needed to say and Miranda seemed to go lax and an understanding smile played at her lips.

“Alright,” She spoke voice just as soft as her smile, “I understand.” She said leaning over and placed a more delict kiss on his lips.

“Thank you.” Will said with a small smile as he squeezed her hand in his.

“Going once, twice and sold,” The auctioneer banged his gavel, “To the auction houses more renowned bidder one Doctor Hannibal Lecter!” Will’s head snapped away from Miranda and

his wide eyes landed over to Hannibal, who sat poised in his seat with a complacent smile playing his lips as he turned his attention from the crowed and over to Will and Miranda.

The auction soon ended and the final crash of the gavel traveled through the arena for the rich. The participants excused to enjoy the offering drinks that were going to be served. A way to make sure everyone left as though they had gained something in the endeavor. To help heal their bruised egos from their loss and making sure there was no hard feelings between anyone. Can't feel anger when you are sipping your third free drink.

"Congratulation on the win Doctor Lecter." Will said as Hannibal casually walked over to the couple, who stood by one of the far-off walls. Hannibal easily noticed how Miranda instinctively wrapped her hands around Will's arm when she noticed his approach far faster than Will had.

"Yes congratulation." Miranda said with a voice that was hiding her true emotions. Hannibal could see the slight hints of resentment that was hidden in her eyes and the fake smile she flashed him. Hannibal just simply bowed his head in thanks. Relishing in the subtle high that came from winning the battle and causing a discomfortable shift in Miranda's behaver towards him.

"What do you plan to do with the painting, if you don't mind me asking that is." Will asked.

"I don't quit know yet if I'm being honest," Hannibal sighed as he closed his hands together in front of him. "One of the down falls when it comes to being easily drawn to art is that after a spontaneous purchase, you're left with the puzzle of trying to find a place for it." He smiled and Will let out a light chuckle.

"I know what you mean, I'm the same with strays. I get so focused on rescuing them from the streets I don't even stop to think if I'll have room at home." Will chuckled as he rubbed the back of his head.

"Maybe I'll just hang it in my office that way we both will be able to enjoy it." Hannibal offered, sending Miranda a sly look with his eyes and soaked in the micro expression she sent his way. As she realized though the battle for the art work was over, their battle over something, or someone else had just begun. And they both knew that neither would be willing to step down as easily as they hoped for.

"Will, sweetheart," The use of a pet name caught Will off-guard, throughout their whole relationship not once did Miranda call him anything other than by his name. It had Will questioning the sudden insertion of needing to give him one, along with him wondering if that ment that she wanted him to give her the same courtesy. But he couldn't focus on those thoughts for now Miranda was still talking to him. "Why don't you go get us a drink please." She smiled and gave Will's arm a light squeeze.

"Sure, no problem." Will said with a tweaked smile and a stiff nod before excusing himself to go track down a few drinks for everyone. Leaving Hannibal with Miranda and the atmosphere in the building shifted as soon as Miranda's eyes left Will as he was lost in the crowd. As her eyes came back to Hannibal and they made eye contact for the second time that night. It was evidential that she was trying to pick apart Hannibal and he welcomed her

to try. He was used to prying eyes attempting to see past the person suit he meticulously sewn over time, it was always rewarding when he watched them fail to do so.

As Miranda picked him apart, he did the same with her, it was only fair. Except unlike Miranda Hannibal had time to study on who he was going to encounter later on. By what he gathered in their first interaction Will had never even mentioned him to her and he wouldn't deny that small part of him that felt a cold sting at the fact. But that just ment the more off-guard Miranda would be when they did eventually meet, more off-guard than Hannibal was at the beginning of the night when he spotted Will in the crowd. She possibly knew nothing about him, yet he knew more about her for them to be simple strangers. As they calculated the other it was obvious to them bother that they were holding back their own predator for so long and now they faced the opportunity to unlock the cage door. To see which one would come out on top was right in front of them. A show grander than what was promised to the attendants. But they both knew better than to flash their fangs at the other just yet, well Hannibal he knew when to shed just that part of himself and when not to. He wondered if Miranda was the same way, could she hold back while in his orbit or would she succumb to her darker side, the side she let slip while they fought against one another just earlier. He questioned what might have happened if Will had not intervened, how far would she have gone to be able to claim the painting. It also had him questioning himself.

It was a nice painting, the folklore behind the character was intriguing, but Hannibal was far more an admirer of the tales of Greek mythology than Nose. If it was just him alone tonight, he would have never even raised his paddle for the wolf. Yet he had just spent nine thousand dollars on it, just so *she* couldn't have it. Had he really just sunk that low? Though he noticed the oozing bubbling tar that made an unhealthy habit of bothering him at some of the most inconvenient times did subside when he was announced the owner of the art piece. Like a hungry dog being given a meager bone; not enough to stray off the hunger for long, but it did settle the need to eat.

"I want to congratulate you once more Doctor Lecter," Miranda spoke, "you put up one hell of fight back there."

"Thank you." If Miranda was waiting for her own complement from him, she was sadly mistaken. But by the lack of any signs of distain from not receiving one, he knew she already expected that much from him.

"Though, I wasn't really bidding for the painting for myself," Miranda began to look around the area, "I was just trying to get it for Will as a gift, I was the one to drag him out here and I was hoping he'd leave with something he might have liked." She said with a nonchalant shrug as she crossed her arms. "At least I was able to gift him with that one-of-a-kind hand tailored waistcoat."

"Do you make a habit of showering Will with high end gifts?" Hannibal asked not falling for the blatant attack to try and crawl under his skin, he knew about the cologne, the movie tickets, and now the waistcoat. But what else was Will not telling him during their weekly discussions. Miranda smirked at the question and brought her attention back to Hannibal.

"Doctor Lecter, you make it sound like that's such a bad thing to do. I'm just giving Will things that he deserves to have and if those things tend to be "high end gifts" as you put it

then so be it." Miranda's smile was coy as she twirled a lock of her hair. "I mean it is quit amusing to see his expression when it happens. The way his face adorably scrunches up in confusion and then slowly softens in realization. Followed by an attempt to get me to change my mind." Miranda lightly clicked her tongue, "It's so addicting." Miranda crinkled her nose in a mischievous smile, but that smile faded and was replaced with something more akin to genuine. "And speaking of addicting," Her voice just loud enough for the two. "I see you managed to track down a few drinks Will."

"I'm sorry it took me a minute." Will said as he carried three tall champagne flutes, each one holding similar toasted gold liquid. "Even though they are only offering the same drink, some people still find the need to voice what they would rather be having to the server." Will said his voice breaking down to a mumble as he battled off the need to speak stronger on his opinion.

"Understandable." Miranda smiled as Will handed her the glass and took a delicate drink. "And thank you sweetheart."

"You're welcome," Will stiffly smiled, the unforeseen addition of pet names still having a puzzling effect on his mind. "Here's yours Doctor." Will quickly continued as he turned towards Hannibal and held out a glass. Trying to refocus his thoughts on the objective at hand.

"Thank you Will." Hannibal warmly smiled as he reached over to take the glass. "And there is no need to use formalities with me Will," his fingers intentionally slipped over the other's, caging a few of Will's under his. Holding them to the glass trapping them underneath his hold as he shifted his body so he was leaning forward. "Please call me *Hannibal*." The smile he gave the other flashed just the right amount of teeth and he noticed Will's pupils slowly in large at such an intimate moment thrown upon him. Hannibal could practically see the cogs in that enticing mind come to a halt. It was beautiful.

"Alright Hannibal." Will breathed out, the man's name felt heavy on his tongue, it was so foreign to call him by anything other than his title. There was a comfort in not doing anything other than that, keeping things formal meant keeping whatever was between them on the line of professional. Will wasn't blind to Hannibal's attempt to challenge that boundary; the man did bring him a home cooked breakfast during their first outing together, yet Hannibal wasn't the only guilty party in the matter of boundaries. Even though Will tried to enforce them at some points, he also didn't flat out stop the attempts and did enjoy that small amount of friendship that they grew together.

"That's all I ask for." Hannibal sent Will another smile and felt a splash of pride when he noticed the sides of Will's neck turn a radiant shade of pink. As he took his glass from him, releasing his light hold and leaned back comfortably to bask in his accomplishment. Will just gave a stiff nod, his eyes flickering around the room as he went to go stand fully by Miranda's side. When Will joined her side, Miranda began to place her arm around his, but the routine action did not play out right. The arm Miranda wrapped around haphazardly tilted inward, causing the champagne flute to spill what it held onto Will's front.

"Crap." He hissed as he held his arms slightly out to the side and took a stop back. Looking down at now his semi-soaked abdomen.

“Oh dear.” Miranda said as she too took a step back. “You should probably go clean up; I believe the restroom are just right over there.” Miranda pointed out, taking his arm and slightly turning him towards the direction she was talking about.

“Yeah, you’re right,” Will sighed as he tried to wipe away the champagne that did not soak fully in, “if you’ll excuse me.” He said frustration laced in his voice as he looked up at the Hannibal and Miranda, before briskly walking away. Miranda watched Will walk away sympathy painted on her face, that was before she turned her attention back to Hannibal. Where the look slid from her face as she took a tentative drink from her glass, eyebrows slight raised in a challenging manner. She was admitting to the deed she had just done without saying a single word and knew Hannibal wouldn’t call her out on it. Miranda lowered her glass and swirled the liquid a few times.

“Well,” She finally spoke, her eyes not leaving the glass, “I better make sure he found his way.” She said before coolly walking past Hannibal, with her head slightly held up higher. Ignoring the way his eyes crinkled in annoyance, while he took his first sip of the champagne that held a taste of bitter on his tongue.

Will let out a frustrated sigh as wiped a damp paper towel lightly over himself for a third time, before throwing it away. There was no use anymore, he cleaned up as much as he could, but he still felt bad for possibly ruining the article of clothing the Miranda put so much time into. Will walked back over to the sink and grabbed ahold of the sides and let out a deep breath. His emotions were all over the place. The nerves that seemed to come and go like a rising tide mixing with the odd flicker that was born when Hannibal had caught him from falling, the warmth that Miranda ignited in him and whatever the hell happened with Hannibal when the man insisted on dropping formalities. He felt like he was spinning in a rapped whirlwind and there was no stopping him. He just needed time to catch himself and right now the quiet of the men’s restroom was the only place he could find it. He could still hear the orchestra, muffled by the closed room, along with a rise in voices now and then when there was an increase in joyous attitude. He just needed to breath.

A metallic click caught Will’s attention, the last thing he wanted was someone walking in on him on the verge of having a nervous breakdown. He looked up at the mirror and he was caught off-guard, instead of seeing some man standing by the door it was Miranda. Leaning against the door clicking over the lock with a mischievous smile tainting he lips as she looked right at him. He turned around to face her as if to make sure it was really her, he was seeing and not just trick of the mirror.

“Miranda what are you.” Will was cut off when Miranda sauntered over to him at a fast pace, placed her hand behind his head and brought him into a deep heat filled kiss. Will could never understand how she was able to do it, but whenever they were brought together by the act of kissing all his thoughts seemed to just vanish. No matter how clouded his mind would become and how tight it felt with seemingly endless thoughts that made it a habit of bashing against his skull. When their lips laid upon one another his mind would just empty itself. Like Miranda had come along and opened the flood gates and the relief that would follow would be memorizing. It was addicting to say the least.

Soon Will found himself opening up to the thrust upon kiss, his hands rested on her hips as Miranda's other hand pressed into his shoulder. All while they began to explore each other's mouth, just like the night on her couch. He took in the hint of reasonably priced champagne that lingered in her mouth. A small fire began to ignite in the pit of his stomach as Miranda's hand slowly ran through his hair and down to his jaw. Will pulled Miranda closer to him, pressing himself against her and he felt her knee slid between his legs. Her other hand that was pressed against his shoulder slid down his chest and did not stop. Will suddenly pulled back from the passion filled kiss, breath heavy, eyelids half-mast, and face on the verge of becoming flush.

"Miranda what are we doing?" He finally asked as he tried to catch his breath and any thought of sensibility that might cross his path. Miranda gave him a coy smile, took the hand that was placed on his jaw and moved it back to his hair.

"I just thought you could use a little *release*," She purred as she played with a skewed curl, before placing butterfly like kisses along Will's jaw and he felt a string of electric pulses of pleaser travel through his body. "You deserve it after all." She whispered into his ear before lightly nibbling at his earlobe and another static ran over his heightened nerves. Will fought off the intrusive moan that rammed itself against his lips.

"Miranda," Will breathed out through the building pleasure that tried to fog his brain as Miranda began to leave trails of kisses along his neck, interwoven with light teases of nips. "We really shouldn't do this," He tried to continue as he attempted to focus. "What if someone walks in." He finally managed to get out and Miranda let out a tentative hum and leaned back with a smirk.

"That's why I locked the door," She said as her hand began to travel down Will's front, her fingertips electric, "So don't think about it too hard and just focus on us." She purred and Will harshly swallowed. As Miranda continued her course as her fingers traveled further down Will's front and began to undo the button of his slacks. Will quickly caught her hand in his and Miranda looked up with a seductive smile leaned forward and caught his now stained red lips once more. This time biting his lower lip to send out another pulse of pleasure that traveled straight down to his groin and this time Will couldn't fight off the moan that ran up his throat and broke past his lips. Miranda leaned back with a smirk. "Stop thinking so *hard* about this Will," She breathed, "just let me *treat* you." She placed a more delicate kiss onto his lips to help seal in her offer and Will let go of her hand, letting her continue what she started. The sequence of her actions had already started a chain of reaction for him and Miranda seemed hell bent on making sure everything played out.

Miranda elegantly lowered herself to her knees as she moved from undoing Will's button, to unzipping his zipper. Her eyes never leaving his as a sinful smirk played at her enticing lips.

God, this is really happening. Will thought as he tried not to watch as Miranda guided his erection out into the open. He let out a deep uneven breath when he felt Miranda place a light kiss to the tip of his cock, a promise to what awaited him, before she slowly eased his cock into to her hot waiting mouth and a more prominent wave a hard pleasure rained over his body. Will gripped the edge of the sink until his knuckles turned white as he was lost in the enclosed wet heat of Miranda's mouth. The way her soft tongue traveled along the side his

shaft, in an almost teasing manner, and when she began to move her head back and forth. Will had to bite down on his knuckle, to stop yet another sinful moan from escaping his lips. While Miranda sent wave after wave through his body, just using her mouth alone on him.

Miranda's hand traveled up the outside of Will's right leg and slowly stroked at his thigh, causing goosebumps to rise on his flesh, as she took him deeper and deeper into her mouth. Will tipped his head back and let the shutter of pleasure map out his body. Miranda applied longer laps of her tongue under his shaft while she added more suction with her intake of his cock. It had Will on edge as he began to feel the buildup of a release in his horizon.

"*Miranda*." Will moaned liquid heat began to build up inside him with each movement of her mouth against him and his heart pumped wildly in his ribcage. "I'm so close." He managed to say out through the now deep fog of pleasure.

Miranda pulled away from Will, halting the oncoming orgasm for a split second. "Good." Was all she said, her voice still seductive, before returning her attention back to his cock and taking him in once more. Will didn't stop the harsh moan when she continued to give him the rush of pleasure. He found the he was losing himself in the hot sensation Miranda applied to his cock and the orgasm that he thought was going to be ripped from him soon began to be rebuild. Miranda no longer used her tongue to draw out any more elective waves, instead just let his cock travel on top of it. Acting as a sort of cushion for him. While she continued the momentum as she bobbed back and forth drawing out Will's orgasm.

"Miranda I'm about to." Will heavily breathed out as he tried to warn Miranda what might happen if she continued to give him the tantalizing stimuli to his cock. But instead of pulling away from him like so many past partners would have, she just kept going. Picking up speed as if she coaxing out the release, even squeezing the meat of his thigh muscle; that had grown tense during the build of soon delight. Will arched his back as the harsh waves of release and intoxicating pleasure washed through his body. His nerves alight as his muscle contracted in short beats before going lax completely.

Miranda slowly pulled back releasing Will's now soft cock from her skilled mouth and stood up. Will held tightly to the sink, eyes shut, breathing heavy as he rode through the enticing high of ecstasy that Miranda had gifted him. He heard the neighboring sink turn on for a few seconds and then shut off, Will watched through heavy lidded eye as Miranda fixed her lipstick. Like that was the only reason she came into the restroom in the first place, she looked over at Will; who wished he looked as well put together as she did, and gave him another coy smile. She walked over to him and placed a delicate hand on the side of his heat flushed face. Slowly cooling down with the slipping pleasure that settled under his skin. She leaned forward and gently placed a kiss on the edge of his mouth.

"I'm glad you enjoyed it." She whispered with a knowing smile before turning away and walking out of the restroom as if she wasn't just on her knees a few minutes prior giving Will one hell of a blowjob. Will took another deep breath, lungs stiffly expanding, before he quickly stuffed himself back into his pants. All while trying to wrap his mind around what just happened. He turned back to the mirror and was meet with his disheveled reflection. Skin a deep fading shade of red, once well-groomed hair askew, and pupils blown wide from

ecstasy. He looked ridiculous and the marks of red lipstick that littered his skin did not help the matter.

After gathering himself for the second time that night, Will emerged from the restroom to make his way back to Miranda and Hannibal. Who still stood where he was left, champagne glass in hand and eyes subtlety roaming the crowd. Most likely looking for the profiler. Will didn't miss how the other's eyes almost lit up when Will approached the group.

"Will I'm glad you could rejoin us," Hannibal smiled, "and it seems you managed to rescue your waistcoat." He added as he watched Will give him a jerk of a nod while he walked past him and as the younger man made his way past to stand by Miranda; who offered Will a new glass of champaign and a warm smile. Hannibal caught the gentle fragrant wafting off of Will, the fading sent of arousal. The signs were all there now that he was able to take in all of Will's appearance. The fading flush of his skin, the poor attempt to make himself look presentable, how he seemed relaxed while also on edge, and the way he gripped the champaign flute with a slight tremor in his hand. Hannibal looked away from Will and over to Miranda, who had her arm back around his and still giving Will a soft warm smile. Before she casted Hannibal a look and that warm smile turned devilish. Confirming what Hannibal was thinking.

And here I thought I stooped low when I spent nine thousand on a painting. Here you were willing to risk your own public image. I can see now that you will not bend as easily as one might have thought. Even though the idea only crossed my mind once, I should have known better. It was foolish to think otherwise. Hannibal thought as he took a deep drink of champagne. He could feel it begin to boil in his stomach as his blood ran hot with developing distain.

"Oh shoot," Miranda spoke, her sudden voice caused Will to slightly jump out of his hazed mind and he slowly turned to her. "I just remembered I have a meeting with my marketing team tomorrow morning." Miranda continued as she set down her glass. "You don't mind if we cut this night a bit short do you Will?"

Will blinked a few times another attempt to ground himself in the present. "Sure, no problem." Will finally spoke for the first time since leaving the restroom Miranda beamed at Will obvious pleased with his answer.

"Leaving so soon." Hannibal spoke reinstating himself into the world that Miranda was trying to build around Will.

"Yeah, Miranda has work in the morning and I honestly had enough social interaction for the night." He rubbed the back of his neck and set down his untouched glass of champagne with a deep breath that started out shaky, but settled out near the end. "Maybe the whole week." He almost sneered, even though he faced Hannibal his eyes avoided the man.

Feeling ashamed about what just happened in the restroom are we. Ashamed of what transpired, what had you acting like hormone-stricken teenager. It's obvious that you had not planned for it happen and yet how hard did you put an argument to stop it in the first place. Did you just succumb to basic human desire, easily folded when the first dosage of dopamine flooded your racing mind. And here I was praising you earlier for being able to blend in

amongst these people, now you just left me with the bitter taste of disappointment. At least you are suffering with the feeling of shame as you stand in front of me. Knowing that I might find it in myself to forgive your decision.

"It was a pleasure to run into you tonight Will," Hannibal smiled, "As it was to finally meet you Miss Rhettford."

"You too," Will nodded, "and once again congratulation of the win." He gave Hannibal a crooked smile.

"Yes, same here." Was all Miranda said as the two began to turn to leave.

"Will before I forget," Hannibal lightly chuckled, "I assume you are going to attended our regular seven thirty Thursday appointment next week?" Will blinked a few times confusion laced in his face and Hannibal hated to admit it, but Miranda was right. Will look adorable when he was confused.

"Yeah of course."

"Good to know, it's just standard protocol that's all. Better to ask you now then call you during a more unsavory moment." Hannibal said as he casted a glance over at Miranda then back at Will and gave him a warm smile. Will just had a puzzled look before shaking it off, chalking it up to Hannibal just acting eccentric like always. "Well, I hope you two make it to your destination safely."

"Thanks and I hope you enjoy the rest of your night," Will said as he turned to leave, but stopped and slightly turned back. "Before I forget, just a heads up. But Jack might contact you in the near future." Hannibal tilted his head slightly. "He believes you might be able to assist in identifying what the weapon the assailant is using in the current case." Will said deliberately leaving out key words while in the company of Miranda.

"That's good to know, thank you for the warning, and I'll be sure to look out for a call from agent Crawford." Hannibal smiled and Will nodded his head, gave a small gesture of good bye before the two finally began their leave.

The drive back to Miranda's house was filled with nothing, but the soft lull of the songs from the radio. Will tried not to think too hard about what had happened in the restroom, but no matter how hard he turned his thoughts to any direction. His mind still found its way back to their act of adultery, the odd part was how split he felt towards the act. Part of him was utterly ashamed with himself, anyone could have banged on the door while it was happening. He recalled how many calls he received back when he was cop in New Orleans on couples doing what he and Miranda had done. Of course those couples were far more out in the open at the time, like in the park, behind bars, or sometimes just standing right outside their houses. At least Miranda had locked the door to prevent someone from just bursting in and if someone did knock they could easily reset themselves. Yet the other part of his mind found what they did intoxicatingly reckless. The surge of fear of getting caught mixing with the heated promise of pleasure. It was a delouses cocktail of two opposite emotion that Will often forgot could pair so well together. Just thinking about it had his worn out senses slowly throbbing back to life, as his mind replayed what he was feeling during the lead up. His imagination

threatening to go into hyper active mode if given the chance. Will quickly brushed it aside, locking it back in its cage before it could attempt to run wild on him. The last thing he wanted to was to risk another erection while on the drive back to Miranda's place. He felt far to drained from the nights event to even considered what might happen if Miranda caught onto what signal his body could send out. Luckily for him his body and mind decided to play nice.

"I had a wonderful time tonight Will." Miranda spoke softly as he led her up her steps and to her door. "Even running into Doctor Lecter was semi enjoyable." She chuckled lightly. "Though I feel as though he doesn't quite like me." She hummed in wonder.

"That's just Lecter, he likes to keep those he doesn't know too well at an arm's length," Will said, "he's like a cat, he's selective about who he show's affection towards and who he just stands to be around, but I'm sure over time the two of you will find a comfort in one another's company." Will said looking around the porch, hands in his pockets.

"I hope so, otherwise I'd hate to put a strain on your friendship. You know you being in a relationship with someone he doesn't like." Miranda began to unlock her door.

Will chuckled and lightly shook his head. "Trust me Lecter is far too pristine to act in such a childish manner sort of way and if he doesn't approve of our relationship, I'll just tell him to bite his tongue. He worked too hard in trying to get me to admit to are friendship to just throw it all away."

"That's good to know, because I don't think I'd be able to sleep at night knowing I cause such a harsh rift between you two." Miranda smiled as she placed a hand on Will's cheek and gave him a kiss. "I guess this is goodnight for the both of use."

"Guess so," Will agreed leaning in for another kiss, but after the second kiss Will took a step back as he was reminded about their little act at the auction. "Wait Miranda we need to talk." Will said in a serious tone.

Miranda tilted her head to the side and hummed. "About what sweetheart?" There she went again with the pet name, Will felt like she was trying to send his mind through a loop, to get him to focus on one question other than the main question in his mind.

"What was the idea back there in at the auction, in the restroom?" Will asked. "I mean you and I can both agree that all came out of left field, right? You just out of nowhere decided to give me a quickie why is that?" Will was in need of answers, the closes they ever gotten to an intimate act was when they were making out on her couch just last week and suddenly Miranda performed oral sex on him unprompted. It was just too confusing for him, there had to be a reason for it.

Miranda let out a light chuckle, bringing her hand over her mouth. "Oh Will," She sighed and placed her hand back on his cheek, "You are thinking too deep into it," She leaned in close to his other ear, "I just wanted to treat you," She tenderly kissed his cheek, "that's all to it." She whispered as she pulled away and gave him a seductive wink, before turning back to her door and began to walk inside. Only stopping half way, turning to look over her shoulder

at Will and smiled. “Good night Will, pleasant dreams.” With that she left a very lost in thought Will standing on her porch, trying hard not to decipher what she could have ment.

Treat me, treat me! She made it sound like she offered to pay for dinner or something. Will thought as he walked over to his car fishing his keys from his pocket. *What she did was give me a blowjob in the restroom in a very crowded auction house, while Lecter waited for my return! I wouldn’t call that treating me, hell I don’t know what you’d call that.* Will let out a deep breath as he got in his Volvo and began to pull out of the driveway, frustration soon replaced with amusement as he drove down the dark road, loose fist pressed to his mouth. *God who have I gotten myself involved with.* Will chuckled to himself as he lowered his fist and took the steering wheel with both hands.

Winding Pathways

Chapter Summary

> Will finds himself facing some uncertain emotions that lay before him. Along with acts that leave his mind and well placed barriers shifting.

Chapter Notes

> Man here I thought the last chapter was a beast to slay, but I guess I stand corrected. Not once have I ever written then deleted more times while writing this fic then in this chapter alone.
> But hey this fic is sitting pretty at 113 pages on Word Documents it officially the longest story I have every written how amazing is that that!!!
> Anyway hope ya'll enjoy the chapter :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will would never call his dreams pleasant, the nights where his mind wasn't assaulted by images of lifeless eyes, limp twisted bodies of victims who he masqueraded as their killer were a rare occurrence for him. As rare as him actually handing over his temporary badge in the near future. Sure, he mulled over the idea of actually telling Jack that he was done with all the never-ending supply of bodies that were dropped at his feet, to just step back into his role as a professor full time. The idea was as tempting as the apple that the devil offered Eve. If he was Eve, then who in his life could he consider the devil, who would be trying to lure Will away from his life with the Bureau and towards the enticing tree. Whispering the promise of sin into his ears every attempt that came by. The snake sought out the wondering Eve and spoke to her with its alluring words and guiding her innocent mind to the forbidden fruit. If that was the case than he should just take a bite of the apple, have the hard skin snap under his teeth and have the knowledge fill his mind, grant him the view of the world that was once kept from him.

Unlike Eve, Will knew he wouldn't succumb to such a temptation as easily; he liked to blame his own stubbornness. Though the idea of just teaching, or just walking away from the FBI in general was its own forbidden fruit to him. Will knew he could never just turn his back that easily, the fact that he was throwing murderers in jail and stopping the possibility of a life being crudely ripped away, it pulled him further and further away from the fruit tree. It made him feel like he was accomplishing something he was only fooling himself in to believing when he was teaching. It was one thing to supply the future agents that came through his classroom with techniques that would better them, it was another to actually be out there and

doing something instead of just standing by and wondering if what he was saying was actually reaching its intended destination.

With the decision to turn down the idea of quitting, to stubbornly refuse the advice that was thrusted upon him on an almost rhythm base manner, came the repercussion of his actions. The repercussions came back to him in his dreams, where Will was punished for his need to serve justice. Where he could not run away so easily when he was awake, when he was awake, he could just turn his thoughts to something else. He could distract his mind with his dogs, his hobbies, or other future plans that might await him. But Will couldn't keep that act up twenty-four seven, he had to return his thoughts back to the land of the dead and as though his brain was getting revenge on him for what he put it through with the gruesome world he lived in. It would seek vengeance on him when he was asleep, there his imagination ran unchecked and its favorite toy to play with was himself.

The dream he was supplied with when he settled into bed, his head held in the welcoming embrace of his pillow, could be described as indecisive. As if his mind did not know if it wanted to torment Will for stretching it thin with the case he was working on, or treat him for spending a night out and acting once again relatively socially normal. He once again was given the dream of himself walking down a forested path, but instead of the sun that cut through the tree tops and warmed his skin, he was given the light of the moon. There were no warm colors to fill his dreams, no oranges or yellows that cascaded off the turning leaves. Instead, he was given hues of deep blues and greys. The dead leaves and sticks crunched under his feet as he followed the winding path, a destination unknown to him as the air he breathed out turned to puffs of vapor. His hands stuffed in his pockets as he laid certain on following the trail that expanded the deeper he walked into the woods. Once in a while a member of his pack would run across the pathway. The dog would bring a certain comfort to his mind, as if telling him that if this was nightmare than why would they be here with him?

As he watched another dog run by him to disappear into the thick woods, he turned back to notice something that stood out in the cool hues of his surroundings. Decorating the path, making a smaller trail were bright red droplets of blood. For the first time since he began the dream, Will felt himself hesitate to continue on with his journey to see where this trail could take him. Even though a part of him wanted to just stop, he was reminded that he was indeed dreaming and he did not have choice in rather he stopped or not. Will found himself continuing the walk down the now tainted trail, no more members of his pack crossed his path as he followed the blood trail and that made the unease that began to slowly rise inside of him pick up its pace. The droplets began to grow in size the more he walked down the trail, instead of being little drips of blood they resembled small puddles. It made it hard for Will to try and avoid stepping into the red liquid, a part of him was glad his dogs stopped running through, he wouldn't be able to handle the sight of them splashing through the unwanted puddles. Picturing their fur matted with blood was an image he fought to avoid, fought harder than trying to keep his mind from being invaded by death. They were innocent, his nightmares were not.

Will stopped in his tracks when he noticed the path finally broke in front of him. No longer just an endless winding line that seemed to hold no true destination, but instead forked off into two possibilities. Will looked to the left path and he was given just a black inky void, any light that might go near it faced the fate of being swallowed and turned into nothing. He

turned his attention to the other one and was given the same option, just endless black stared back at him. Either option gave him no clue on what might await him if he chose right or wrong. The blood, that could help ease the difficulty of a decision that was laid in front of him. He glanced down at the puddles of blood that rested at his feet and followed the trail inside the trail to where it would break off. If it broke off to the left then he would take the right and vice versa. Only his brain decided that it was going to be difficult and he wasn't all that surprised to see the blood split off in both directions.

Will took a small step back and he was met with a warm pull, as though an invisible hand had taken his and was slowly easing him towards the left. The hold was gentle yet, firm as it guided Will towards the welcoming darkness, Will found himself being led to the new destination without any struggle in his body. The warmth soon developed into a more intense heat as he grew closer to sealing his fate to walkdown the left path and he found himself welcoming that harsh heat. The heat spread through his body and acted as strings attached to his arms and legs, he was a puppet and the darkness was the puppet master. What terrified him deep down though was the idea that he was willingly letting the invisible strings take control of him, he found no need to fight their guidance, he felt no alarm in letting them do what they wanted. The more he grew closer to the darkness the more at ease he felt. As Will stepped closer to the thresh hold, just a step or two away from being consumed, something caught his other wrist. Wrapping it in a much more intense hold and he felt a delicate warmth fluttered up his arm. Will quickly looked down and was met with the sight of an elegant gold cuff tightly clamped around his wrist, attached to that cuff was just as elegant gold chain that glowed under the crisp light of the moon and it emerged from the right side of the path.

He quickly yanked his arm; an attempt to break out of the hold it had on him, but the chain just followed his movements, snaping up towards the sky then falling down limp. Will just stared at the chain, waiting for any signs of movement, only when he felt that intense heat began to stir and grab his attention did the chain finally come to life. Will watched as the chain began to grow tight as it slithered back into where it had emerged and slowly pull Will with it. He felt the idea of fighting the chain drain out of his mind as he watched as the golden snake moved along the forest floor and he found himself slowly turning away from the intense heat. In favor of the more subtle warmth and began to let the chain guide him over to the right side, it seemed so much easier to follow the chain because it was something he could see. It was something feasible, he knew it was chain that was pulling him towards the darkness and not some invisible entity that he had no idea what its identity was.

The chain gently pulled him towards the light warmth the right sided darkness offered, another harsher tug caught his left arm and Will was pulled against the chain. He turned to see his left arm out stretched, fingers flared out and muscles pulled taunt. There was a soft clink of metal and what followed was another pull from the gold chain, Will felt his right arm be pulled out until it matched its counterpart. Will found himself being unwillingly the center of an unforgiving match of tug of war, unknown entity against thick gold chain. When one pulled so did the other. Will watched as his limbs were pulled in both directions and he finally felt control given back him, to finally be granted something he desperately needed and he was going to protect himself with it. He strained against both holds as he pulled his arms back to him, but it was no use he was dealing with two distinct forces, forces with their own well-matched strength, forces that both wanted him. And they did not care if they were going to tear Will in half in the prospect of winning.

Will jolted awake, just as his limbs began to be ripped out of their sockets. The image of witnessing his flesh being gruesomely torn apart, white bone shards shining in the moon light. With his own blood splattering out of the fresh tears and pooling to the forest floor, to mix with the blood that already tainted the forest. The sight engraved itself behind his eyes and he felt a phantom scream of pain fade into his chest as he sat upright in bed. His legs tangled in his blanket and sweat trinkling down his back, Will took a deep nerve settling breath as he clenched and unclenched his hands in the bed sheets. He rolled both his shoulders and lifted his tired arms slightly, just to make sure it was all a dream and that both his arms were still in fact attached to his body. Before he let them fall back to his side, with a heavy tired laced sigh.

The restaurant held a warmth to it that most restaurants that Miranda often took Will to didn't. With its rustic feel, mixture of warm and dark colors, and the subtle light music that laid hidden under the clanking of dishes. It had Will reminiscing of those old English styled bars that would pop up now and again back when he was working in New Orleans. Will recalled how those establishments never lasted long, they just didn't hold a strong enough alure as some of the more eccentric ones did. What could he say Arthur's Tavern didn't really hold the same appeal compared to The Onyx Skull, where you face the possibility of experiencing a chance in counter with something paranormal.

"I'm really glad we could get some time to see each other," Miranda said as she lightly picked at her salad, "if I would have known I couldn't get a moments peace since Friday with you, I would have invited you in for drink." Miranda sent Will a wink and Will felt her foot lightly brush against his leg along with a light tingle that followed the movement. It had been a while since the two had last held one another's company, only able to communicate through the past five days through quick texts or late-night phone calls, both drowning in their own work. With most people Will didn't really mind that. He could always suffice off of the limited interaction he had with those he allowed into his life, but with Miranda it was a peculiar feeling of longing when it came to her. To be in her presence, to feel that layering warmth that bloomed in his chest that she managed to ignite with ease. Will never grew accustomed to the rare feeling of longing. Maybe it was because he had built his world around the crooked structure of contentment. Ever since he first moved into his house in Wolf Trap, unpacking the last box of the little belongings he had owned at the time; who would have thought moving from a two-room apartment to a two-story house could open his eyes to how little he had possessed. When the last box was emptied and he first faced what might be the rest of his life did Will feel the first block of contentment be placed around him.

"Time flies when you're swamped with work," Will said as he picked up his glass of coke; part of him was tempted to order something off the tap, but he had to go back to work after this and the last thing he wanted was someone catching him with the scent of beer lingering on him. So, he just had to settle with artificial crisp of a childhood favorite. "I just wished it fly to the part when its finished and over with." Will said half towards Miranda and the other into his glass.

"I know what you mean." Miranda lulled her head to the side, "I know I said I tend to eat my lunch at work because I can't separate myself, but after these past few days. I'm ready to just buy a plane ticket and take a month-long vacation to some tropical island." Miranda said as she took a drink of her sparkling water. "Speaking of work," Miranda set her glass down, "I

couldn't help but eavesdrop on what you were telling Doctor Lecter at the auction, about a case you are currently working, mind telling me about it. I do love a good mystery." Miranda grind as she placed her entwined hands under her chin.

Will let out a heavy sigh, *I should have known this was bound to happen ever since Lecter brought up my work with the FBI.* Will thought as he looked down at his half-eaten BLT and tried not to think about how the ketchup that he had poured onto his plate, looked eerily similar to a blood splatter.

"Listen Miranda I don't really think this is something to discuss while eating." Will stated with a subtle gesture to both their plates, Miranda simply rolled her eyes.

"I'm not asking for anything gut wrenchingly gory, just a little insight that's all. Like the CliffsNotes version."

Will nodded his head thoughtfully as he began to piece together away to explain the case, he was working on to Miranda, without having to go into grave detail. And something told him that if their relationship continued, in the near future he would be asked the same question again, so he'd better find a way to answer. That in itself was a very eye-opening thought, the idea of having someone to talk about his day with. To sit down on with someone and just vent about the latest killer he was pulled into profiling. Letting his words spill out of his mouth while his body decompressed after a long day's work, while his partner sat by his side and took in his thoughts and feelings. Now and again giving their own thoughts on the situation, if he thought about it long enough, he could almost picture it and he found that rare flutter grace him with its presents.

But then again wasn't that what he and Lecter did every week, just sit down and talked about what was on his mind and what case he was put through? No, it wasn't like that at all now that Will thought about it, what he and Lecter had was some odd dance between colleague, patient and doctor, and whatever bulb of friendship that was slowly growing. That involved Lecter standing by as a possible structure, because he was being *paid* to do so in the first place. What Will was picturing was more akin to domestic bliss, where the structure was more stable, more reliable, where it was there on its own free will and not because it was expected of it. Something Will never knew he craved until it was presented to him the way it had with Miranda.

"I can do CliffsNotes." Will nodded and Miranda gave him smile. For the next couple of minutes Will found himself telling Miranda everything he could about the Black Widow case, leaving out the unsavory details and sticking to water downed facts. He found himself talking like he would if he was told to give a presentation and he found that, that made it a tad bit easier to openly discuss what he had been working on. He also found that he enjoyed the way Miranda looked at him while he felt as though he was rambling on. She looked at him with complete interest, there was no distance in her eyes, no sign of regret asking him, she was invested in all his words. Seeing this, it had the words slipping out of him much easier than he thought they would.

"By the sounds of it, you guys are having a bit of trouble with this uh Black Widow, is that what you guys named her?" Miranda asked as she picked up her fork to continue to eat and Will picked up a few of his fries.

“No, that’s what the media is calling her, the FBI doesn’t really name the suspects that often. It’s mostly the media that do it, whatever helps sell the story. But going back the first part, yes, she is causing us more trouble than anyone would like to admit to.” He sighed as he caught himself aggressively dipping his fries in the ketchup. Will just dropped his fries and put his hands on the table, the aggravation still trying to catch on fire and spin his mind into a frustrated spiral.

“Well to me it sounds like this woman feels mostly angry with these men, I mean one must feel anger to do what she did,” Miranda took another bit of her salad. “These men must have done something to her in the past to cause such a violent act of anger to come out of her, you know what they say hell hath no fury than a woman’s scorn.”

“That’s why for the past couple weeks I’ve been elbows deep in these men’s past relationship life trying to find someone holding that scorn.” Will said as began to pick at his food, to get his thoughts back on the objective of finishing his lunch, before he had to go back to work. “And honestly it’s exhausting, I feel like my mind is being ripped open with every name I come by while looking at that never-ending list.”

“Well then let’s change the subject shall we,” Miranda smiled as she placed her hands on the table, “because there is something I’ve been dying to show you ever since I spotted it Monday.”

Will tilted his head slightly with a puzzled look as he watched Miranda reach into her purse and she pulled out a small red box, that stood out brightly against the dark green table cloth. Will watched as she placed the box on the table and slowly slid it over to him, her smile beamed just as bright as the box.

“What’s this?” Will asked with hesitation as his hand slowly reached for the offering.

“Well, I have to admit that I still felt a bit upset that I couldn’t get you that painting you liked at the auction.” Miranda began as she played with her hands. “And if I recalled during one of our dinners at that adorable diner you like to go to, you mentioned about having to look into getting your watch fixed because I believe it was Zoe who got a hold of yours and accidently cracked the screen and bent one of the hands.” Will’s eyes widened as he fully took the box. Realization on what it held rushed into his mind like a ramped wave.

“You didn’t.”

“Take a look.” Miranda smirked devilishly as her eyes lowered to focus on the box then back at him. And watched as Will opened it and stared at what it held in astonishment.

“Miranda.”

“Do you like it?” Will looked down at the wrist piece, it’s dark rich blue face pared with the polished gold trim and hands, all held together with thick titanium that held the small amount of sun light that flickered on the table. Will marveled at the elegant yet masculine watch, a part of him wanted to take it out and slid in on his wrist, to feel the cool of the metal against his skin and have it capture the light in its fullest. But a stronger louder part of him had him leaving it where it was held.

“Of course, but Miranda this too much,” Will said with unease, finally able to put together a sentence, “I can’t accept this.” He said with a shake of his head as he closed the lid and slowly slid it back over to Miranda, who held a look that verged on disappointment.

“Why not?” Miranda asked her voice a little demanding as she subtle moved her hands off the table. An indication that she wasn’t even going to consider touching the box.

“Because it’s such an extravagate purchase and I don’t, I don’t know, feel comfortable with idea of you spending that kind of money one *me.*”

Miranda tilted her head and her eyes lightly danced around his face, before she let out a breath. “Listen Will I like giving you gifts, it’s my way of expressing my feelings for someone.” She spoke.

“I know that, but Miranda you knew how I felt when you tried to win that panting, it’s only obvious I would react the same way when it comes to this.” Will gestured to the box, he knew the brand of watch that she had presented him and he knew the price that it held, yes it was cheaper than what Miranda might have spent of the painting, but it was still too expensive for Will to accept without feeling guilty. “I’m sorry I can’t accept it.”

“Well how about this,” Miranda began as she reached over and took ahold of Will’s hands and slowly rubbed her thumbs over his knuckles. Causing a wave of warm prickles to ascend up his arms. “Why don’t you just hold on to the watch for a week. You don’t even have to wear it. Just hold onto it and if you still don’t feel comfortable with it then just give it back and I’ll return it and I won’t feel bad about it at all.” Miranda smiled and lightly leaned in. “Please.”

Will leaned back in his chair, not fully pulling away from her hold, but still giving himself some semblance of space. He looked down at their hands, the way Miranda’s thumbs lightly stroked his knuckles and how it feed that warm flutter that had emerged earlier. All while he thought over what she had just told him, would it really be that bad if he just indulged her idea?

“Alright, I’ll hold on to it for one week.” Will smiled. *God, why do I cave in so easily when it comes to you?*

Beverly let out a whistle as she held the watch in her hand, turning it over and examining the way the metal shined under the florescent lights of the breakroom. “Man, this is some watch.” She said with a raised eyebrow. “You know when you said you were going out to get lunch with your girlfriend, the most I thought of is you were going to bring back a doggie bag not this.” She added as she handed the watch back to Will; who sat at one of the standard plastic folding round tables.

“Thanks, and same here.” Will mumbled as he took the watch from her and just held the heavy object in his hand. He still felt a wildly uncertain feeling pool in his stomach.

“But you know what this means right?” Beverly asked as she began to pour herself and Will a cup of coffee.

“No, not really.” Will answered with a tired expression as he set the watch down in favor of taking the cup of coffee. “But something tells me you are going to tell me anyway.” He added as he took a drink at the nearly stale coffee, the way he felt he didn’t have the energy to be picky.

“You are dating a sugar mommy.”

“What!” He squawked, nearly chocking on the scolding cup of coffee, as his brain suddenly imploded at the accusation. Beverly leaned against the counter and just nodded her head.

“Yep, you Will Graham have found yourself involved with a sugar mommy.” Beverly spoke as she gestured lightly towards him with her cup, before taking a drink.

“Miranda is not my sugar mommy, what we have is just a normal standard relationship.” Will said as he set down his cup, afraid if this conversation continued; which he knew it would, that he would end up dropping it. “The fact you even toyed with the idea is ridiculous.”

“Yeah, but it’s true,” Beverly smirked as she leaned away from the counter, “the facts are all there once you look at it. For example, she’s richer than you.”

“So were half the girls I dated in high school.”

“Alright,” Beverly nodded, “she takes you to expensive places to eat where she insists on paying for the meal.”

“We don’t always go to expensive restaurants, last week we stopped at a Chinese food place, where I’ll have you know I paid for the meal.”

“Okay I see where this is going.” Beverly smirked at the unintentional game that they had started and began to rise to the challenge. “How about this, she took you to an art auction full of wealthy art snobs.”

“She had a plus one and didn’t want to go by herself and she had to twist my arm into going. Otherwise, she would have attended alone.”

Beverly smirked and leaned forward. “She is older than you.”

“She’s the same age as Lecter.” Will interjected and Beverly just raised her eyebrow.

“Not helping your case.” Will let out a heavy breath, he knew he was beat. He couldn’t think of a response to counter the blatant age gap that he shared with Miranda. To be honest he never really thought about the age gap in the first place, he knew she was older than him when they first met. But he didn’t know how much older until Miranda was telling him about her last birthday celebration, where she reviled her age to him and he really didn’t mind the distance between their ages.

“Okay you have a point there,” Will said as he loosely crossed his arms as he thought of a counter point. “But if this is true, which it’s not. It would imply that she is doing all this in exchange for sexual favors and Miranda has not expected anything like that from me.” Sure, there was the blowjob in the bathroom, but Beverly did not need to know about that, no one

needed to know about that ever. “It would also imply that I am only with her for her wealth and I’ll have you know that is the furthest from the truth.” He added as he tapped the table with his index finger to help emphasize his point.

“Fair point, you might not face all the stereotypical customs of a sugar mommy and sugar baby relationship,” Beverly took a drink, “but you need to face the facts Will, you managed to get yourself a sugar mommy plan and simply.”

Will let out a groan and rubbed his hands over his face. The idea of him being a sugar baby was so absurd. “You make me regret ever coming to you in the first place, you know that.”

“Yeah, but let’s face it. I am one of the few people you know who doesn’t sugar coat shit,” Beverly smiled, “that and I’m.”

“Basically, my best friend, yes I know that.” Will lightly chuckled as leaned back in his chair and picked up the watch and began to study it. “So, what do you suggest I do with it?”

Beverly just shrugged as she lazily walked over to where Will sat and once again began to look over the wrist piece. “I say wear it for a while, obviously she really wants you to have it,” Beverly stood up, “humor her for the week like she wants and if you can’t get over the idea of her giving you such an expensive gift give it back. No harm done.”

“Yeah, no harm done.” Will sighed.

“There you go,” Beverly smiled as she patted Will on the shoulder, “now why don’t you come and join me down in the lab, I just finished testing nearly every hand tool in the shear family, only a few more to go and I could use the help.” Beverly smiled

“Thanks, but no thanks. I prefer just imagining myself using the murder weapons not actually you know.” Will said with an odd gesture with his hands. It wasn’t the best excuse, but it was the truth. The further he could distance himself in the physical world the less frayed he felt entering the imaginary. “That and Zeller finally emailed me a copy of the interviews he took from Moore’s party, so now I have something else to drown into.”

“Gotcha.” She said as she began to walk out of the room, stopping at the doorway and looking over her shoulder towards Will, “But if you ever get tired, or need an extra pair of eyes you know where to find me.” She smiled and Will sent her a millisecond of a smile and a nod of his head as he watched Beverly turn the corner. Will looked down at the watch once more and ran his thumb over the face of the watch, obscuring his reflection in the glass.

No harm done.

There was in fact harm done, when it came to accepting the offer Miranda had given him. Will just wished he could pin point why this gift in particular seemed to scratch at his mind with sharp jagged claws, leaving hot irritated thoughts in its wake. He wished he understood why the watch left such a mark on his conscience when all the rest of her gifts did not. He chuckled at the cologne and accepted it without hesitation, the bottle of Glenmorangie Signet he barely put up an argument, and the waistcoat. Will liked to believe the only reason it he didn’t hesitate to accept the article of clothing was because he already put up a fight on where

he stood on attending the art gallery and he folded when he took in all her plays when it came to persuade him into attending.

Will took a small drink of whisky, the same whisky he was just contemplating about when he was comparing the list of gifts Miranda had given him over the time they had spent as a couple. All while he sat in his recliner in front of his freshly lite fireplace, watching as the flames flickered in new life and the heat slowly rolled off into the living room. He took another gentle sip of the drink, the soft taste of mocha and the playfulness of warm spices brining memories of the first time he tried the drink back to life in his clouded mind. As he remanence about that night he had with Miranda while they shared a moment on her couch. The electric fire in the background while they finally submitted to the more sensual part of their relationship, no longer satisfied with just light touches and quick kisses. Will closed his eyes and leaned back into his chair, he could still feel the press of Miranda's body draped over his and the way she felt under his guided touch. All while she traced nearly every inch of his own with her light touches. Their bodies nearly molding into one while they built up on one another's desire to feel as physically close to each other. Who knew how far they would have gotten if they were not interrupted by that call, would they have moved forward in their act of sexual desire that they had for one another? By the way they act on the couch groping at each other like teenagers something told Will, yes, they would have.

Will was brought out of his thoughts by a loud pop coming from the fire place. He rubbed his burning eyes with on hand while the other hung limply over the edge of the arm chair, holding onto his tumbler. He pulled his hand away from his face and stared at the watch, that was now clipped around his wrist. It took him until the end of the day to finally wear it, to feel the cool of the metal take a secure hold. It wasn't surprisingly heavier than the one he had normally worn. He had grown use to the light weight of his old watch, to have it replaced with the heavy titanium made Will more aware of his wrist and the slight movements he tended to do with his hands. Making him wonder if he could actually go through with wearing the accessory for the week, or if he should just take it off and slip it back in the box and leave it on his counter top.

Will twisted his wrist and watched as the metal captured the amber radiating off the fire. Turing the silver into a warm gold, with each subtle twist the watch would throw the gold and cause an artificial glow to subtly shine. Reawaking memories of the painting from the auction, that now called Hannibal's its home. The way the gold chains contrasted with the wolf's dark onyx fur, how they casted a similar glow just like the watch that hung onto his wrist. Had him questioning Hannibal's words that he spoken to him that very night. Was he like Fenrir, doomed to the fate of others thoughts on him, waiting for betrayal that lay awaiting around any corner he might turn. Was he born into the fate of being seen as nothing, but evil that hibernated inside him.

He felt something cold and wet nudge against his other hand and he turned his attention away from the light display. To look down to his side to see Winston slowly take a seat, casting him a glance before nudging at Will's limp hand with a small wag of the tip of his tail.

"Hey buddy," Will said lightly, before he set down his glass and rested his hand on the dog's head. Giving a gentle scratch behind Winston's floppy ears and smiled fondly when he

noticed one of Winston's back legs began to thump. "Can I ask you something?" Will smiled as he lightly began to pet the dog's neck and Winston just looked back at him. "What do you think about this?" Will asked as he moved his other arm in front of Winston and he watched as the dog leaned forward and began to sniff at the watch. The way the glass of the face fogged with each hot breath, Winston finished his own exam with a heave exhale that could be interpreted as a sneeze and Will let out a chuckle as he pulled his arm back. "I'm glad to hear your honest opinion," Will smiled as he wiped his arm off, "because I am far from certain on where I stand on the matter of this gift." Will said as he went back to stare down at the watch.

"She has a bad habit with the men she dates." A mouse like voice echoed in the back of Will's mind as he followed the watches golden hands tick, *"Miranda likes to drag men along for a while, shower them with gifts, and gets them hooked on her until she grows bored of them."* The voice continued and it brought back to life an old detail that he had noticed a while back. The pattern that Will had marked in his mind, the pattern that he tried to break as often as he could. But Miranda seemed to press back and try to reestablish that pattern each time. *Is Brittney right, did I just fall into Miranda's bad habit, is that why she was so pressed on buying me that painting in the first place, why she ended up buying me this watch? Am I just part of her ploy, another cigarette in the packet for her to take out and light up. Feed her gnawing addiction until I'm just a burning stub for her to flick away in to the streets. Where I'm left discarded and forgotten.*

Winston let out a little huff and tapped his paws on the hard floor, dragging Will away from the cliff he stood at in his mind. Will gave the dog another fond smile and one last scratch, before he got up and walked over to his cell phone, that sat at the kitchen counter next to his left-over macaroni and cheese. It was still early in the night; Miranda would most likely still be up and Will needed to know where they stood. He was just given more evidence to back up Brittney's claim and he needed answers.

'Hey, sorry to bother you'

'It's fine, sweetheart, I just finished going over some trade details. Could use the distraction'

'Can we talk over the phone, there is something we need to discuss'

'Yes of course I hope everything is alright'

Will clicked over to the call icon on his phone and waited out the first few rings. During the that time he realized how heavy his heart began to pound in his chest and how sweaty his palms were getting with each ring. *Can't back out now Graham.*

"Hello Will," Came Miranda's cool calm voice on the other end, "what's on your mind?" Will let out a deep breath, metaphorically getting ready to rip off the band-aid.

"Hello Miranda, and we need to talk about today." Will finally said as he leaned against his kitchen counter.

Miranda let out a light chuckle, “Is it about the watch, listen I’m sorry if I’d known it would bother you this much I would never.”

“It’s not the watch,” Will cut in, before he let out a huff, “well it is, but it also isn’t. It’s about the gifts in general Miranda and how they might be affecting our relationship.” Will said as he pinched the bridge of his nose.

“I don’t quite understand Will, I told you, that’s how I show my affection, I thought you understood this.”

“I do and I was also told that, that’s a part of your bad habit.” Will breathed out and there was a small pause on the other side.

“And what is that supposed to mean Will?” Miranda asked and Will could hear the harsh edge in her voice.

“Brittney talked to me last Monday and reviled some things about your past relationships.”

“Really and what did Brittney revile exactly?” Will heard the subtle sound of fabric rubbing against itself. He pictured Miranda crossing her arms, eyes narrowed, and stance hard.

Will shifted his weight, before he explained all of what happened after Miranda had left them to deal with Mister Kramer. The warning she had given him about growing comfortable with Miranda, the pattern; that Brittney had called a ‘bad habit’ that followed with each and every man that she dated, how he was told to expect a text in the near future telling him that it was over, how she’ll be using the same line of reasoning, before blocking his number. All because she will get bored with what they had. It all just poured out of his mouth. Will hadn’t realized how much it had affected him until he had laid it all out in the open for Miranda.

“I just want to know if this might be where our relationship is heading.” Will said his voice floating, there was a heavy pause on the other side of the phone. Miranda hadn’t said a word while Will had told her what had happened, not a single sound came from her. In all honesty the silence felt worse than whatever anger Miranda might release onto him with her words. It made him wonder how hot her anger might be burning on the other end, would be hot and boiling, or so cold it burned. Will casted Winston and uneasy glance, the dog just tilted his head. The band-aid had been ripped off, the wound exposed and irritated. Threating to start bleeding at any moment while the silence brushed up against it, it could go in any direction now.

There was a heavy sigh on the other end of the call, causing Will’s ears to perk as he waited for Miranda to follow that sigh with her words. “Listen Will, I understand where this is all coming from,” Miranda finally spoke, “you are correct there is this pattern to our relationship and you aren’t the only one who noticed it. But there are somethings that you need to know, things that *Brittney* didn’t tell you, along with things she *lied* to you about.” Will caught the irritation that surrounded the assistance name.

“What do you mean?” He asked voice edged on hesitation and irritation, irritation towards himself. He shouldn’t have fallen so easily for Brittney’s warning like he had. It was naive on his part, the idea of her lying to him hadn’t even occurred at the moment. Now that it had he

felt almost foolish. The hesitation was aimed at the truth that not approached him and had him wondering if he should have said anything in the first place. Ignorance was bliss after all.

“While Brittney was right about some parts. Yes, I do use the same line to cut off all contact with my past partners, but that’s only because that’s what those men would listen to when I broke it off with them. Anything else I tried to come up with went in one ear and out the other.” Will understood where Miranda was coming from. He also experienced the occasional clingy break up partner who wouldn’t take the fact that it was over between them seriously, often going into full fits of denial.

“That would explain blocking them.” Will pointed out in low voice, as he lightly stepped into the touchy conversation. Afraid of whatever hidden anger that might be waiting for an excuse to come out. But that fear slightly flattened when he heard Miranda chuckle.

“Yes, that’s why I often blocked these men,” Mirada said, “another thing about those men was the fact that they also noticed my habit of buying gifts and wanting to pay for things and they took full on advantage of that.” The anger was peaking around the corner in Miranda’s words, “Once they spotted the pattern, they snapped at my generosity like hungry hyenas, nearly bleed me dry. They all did that, all except for *you*.” Will felt a flutter in his chest and he swallowed thickly. “See with you, I noticed how often you try to break me out of this little habit I have and I must admit it’s kind of refreshing, to not wonder if this man I am seeing is going to end up like all the others. It’s nice to just enjoy the moments, we share. Especially when it comes to the playful bickering over the checks we tend to do.” Will could hear the smile on Miranda’s lips and he soon felt the stretch of his own, but his smile never grew. He still had questions.

“You said Brittney lied to me, what did she lie about?” Will heard another disgruntle sigh and another rustle of fabric.

“She lied about having to send some of those texts to those men,” Will should have known that was a lie the moment he heard it, Miranda wasn’t the type of person who would let others do her dirty work. She’s the person who wants control over situations, who needs to see things through the way she wants them. Having Brittney send those texts would be handing over reins and Miranda would never do that. “She also lied about me growing bored about these men and that’s why I left them. Honestly that’s just a poor excuse to come up with, I’m almost insulted she’d think of me of being that shallow.”

“So, I’m guessing I don’t have to worry about me boring you anytime soon?” Will chuckled with a downward tilt of his head and relished in the sound in Miranda’s light laugh.

“Of course not, you could never bore me. I believe out of the both of us you are far more interesting.”

“That’s not true.” Will said with a smile as he felt his cheeks threaten to heat up, still not used to compliments.

“You keep telling yourself that,” Miranda lightly said, “and the last thing she lied about is the uncalled for warning she gave you. You can get comfortable in our relationship Will; you don’t have to worry about receiving a text in the near future. Because I don’t plan on splitting

things up any time soon." The flower of warmth that been playing inside his chest finally bloomed and he could feel the petals begin to flutter through his body. Taking care of all the harsh prickles of concern that Brittney managed to stir up in him. "I hope you feel the same way?"

Will blinked rapidly and shifted on his feet, shaking himself out of the lull the warmth brought him so easily. "Yeah of course, I feel the same way. That's why I wanted to talk about it, because I don't see us splitting up anytime soon either." Will quickly spoke.

"That's good to know we are on the same page."

"Yeah, it is good to know," Will smiled as he ducked his head again, "and I'm glad you aren't upset over all this." Will revealed with an exhale, the high tension that his nerves brought him finally leaving his body.

"Don't get me wrong I am upset, just not at you." Miranda huffed. "I can't believe Brittney would pull such a stunt like that. It's like she wanted to give you a reason to feel uncomfortable in our relationship. Almost like she wanted us to have an argument and break things off."

"Sadly, she almost succeeded." Will added woefully, still disgusted with the way he had fallen for what Brittney had told him and the way it nearly came between them.

"There's the key word in that sentence sweetheart, she *almost* succeeded. But luckily, we are both adults and we know how to communicate with one another." Miranda said in in matter-of-fact tone.

"I don't know the way we acted these last two Fridays; one could make the argument." Will chuckled as he rubbed the back of his neck and his ears perked once more when Miranda returned is his chuckle with her own light airy laugh.

"You have a far point there." Miranda said after with a light breath to settle herself. "Speaking of Friday, are you still up for our little movie excursion. I know we talked about it last time and never got to do it, thanks to the auction. So, I was still wondering if you might still want to?"

"Of course, I'm still up for it, sounds like a nice way to end this week," Will nodded his head "you have any ideas on what you want to watch?"

Miranda hummed for a second, "Well, let see we did watch *The Wolfman*, why not continue the pattern of classics and try for a more sophisticated monster like *Dracula."*

"Sounds like a plan." Will said with a soft smile. "Oh, before I forget," Will shifted his stance. "I never had the chance to properly thank you for the watch."

"So, is that an indication that you might be keeping it in the near future."

Will chuckled as he held up his wrist and began to lightly twist, watching as the metal now caught the cool light of the moon that broke through the small window of his kitchen. "It's

not an indefinite yes, but I'll let you know that it is slowly growing on me."

"I'm glad you like it so much."

"Now that's not an open invitation for you to start buying me expensive things, I still don't feel comfortable with you spending so much money on me." Will added as he lowered his arm, so he could hold the counter top.

"There you go again, trying to break me of my bad habit," Miranda lightly chuckled, "I'd make you a promise that this will be the last time of me doing that, but we both know that's a lie don't we."

"Sadly yes." Will said with a sly smile and a light huff of amusement.

"Has there been any new developments in the Black Widow case thus far?" Hannibal asked as he watch Will slowly pace back and forth behind the leather chair, he would sit in. All while Hannibal had taken a seat in his normal spot. Watching Will walk back and forth with his hand tucked against his mouth, it was like watching a caged animal at the zoo. Passing behind the steel bars that kept it from the on lookers. What would happen if that cage door opened for Will, would the profiler run through it with no hesitation in his stride, or would he just stand at the thresh hold and stare out at the invitation to freedom. Wondering if it was trick or not, always the one hesitant to generosity from others. If he didn't find the act of watching Will trying to take a hold of the pent-up frustration with his ability to handle the case, Hannibal would have asked Will to try and take a seat, but sadly for Will Hannibal enjoyed the unintentional show.

Will stopped his pacing for a small moment, to cast Hannibal a simple glance before he lowered his hand from his mouth. "No there hasn't been, not since the last time we talked." Will answered "The crime scene was set up the same way as the last two, except the word she carved into the wall." Will slowly returned to pace back and forth, while the case played though his mind like a bad record. The stylus from the machine catching on the misaligned grooves in the disk, causing whatever warped melody the disc played to stutter.

"It must be very frustrating to face such a dead end, here Jack goes to you for guidance in these cases he has you working and yet you are just as lost as he is." Hannibal indicated and Will came to stop and casted Hannibal a much harsher side glance. The doctor could feel the cold anger leak through Will's lightning filled eyes and he bathed in the amusement that came with the knowledge of knowing his words worked. He had successfully poked the caged beast that stalked behind the chair.

"Frustrating would be an understatement, *Doctor*." The right amount of venom that dripped into his title sent welcome wave of sharp pleasure though out Hannibal's nerves, if he wasn't well in tuned with his facial expressions, he'd be grinning with a Cheshire smile.

"Then what word would you use?" Hannibal asked as he placed his right leg over his left and shifted in his seat. *Come now my little mongoose, show me those sharp teeth that you like to hide from others. Your hackles are already raised now all you need to do is strike.*

“How about maddening, irritated, acrimonious, and let’s finish it with infuriating.” Will took a heavy breath, trying to get the anger that roared in his chest under control. He gripped the chair with white knuckles, the leather was resilient against the tight hold and it helped him realign himself with his surroundings. It also helped him remember how easily Hannibal could poke his buttons and why he kept his barriers up when he was around him during their little sessions. *If you were trying to provoke a response out of me good job Lecter you succeeded, but that will be all you’ll be getting out of me.*

“All words best used to substitute anger.” Hannibal spoke voice as eerily cool like always and the coolness prickled at Will’s own blazing anger that glowed like the heart of a lit piece of charcoal.

“Thanks, I spend my free time browsing the thesaurus.” Will sneered, showing off the small sharp points of his canines and a not-so-subtle roll of his eyes as he left his spot from behind the chair, to aimlessly wonder around the office. An attempt to extinguish the small fire that dared to ignite inside him.

You might not know it my boy, but you are so very lucky I have a high tolerance for your rude behavior and only yours. Or else you would have found yourself being served on my dinner table months ago. But then again, I did want you to show me those fangs of yours didn’t I and what a show it was.

“Could this anger that you are feeling be that missing emotion that this Black Widow is feeling when she is committing her murders?” Will gave a one shoulder shrug, nearly connecting it with the side of his head. Almost closing himself off while he let the question travel through his head.

“I thought about that, jealousy paved the jagged road that this emotion would take. It burst through her mind leaving the perfect opening for it to crawl through. The two emotions could easily go hand in hand, like sorrow and despair.” Will said as he stopped in his tracks and began to lift his gaze towards the celling. “But it’s not that simple, it can’t be.” Will dropped his voice to a near whisper.

“Are you familiar with the saying, if you hear hoofbeats think horses not zebras, it is rather amusing saying they teach us in medical school,” Hannibal began as he stood from his chair and began to walk over to where Will stood. “It was thought of by one Doctor Theodore Woodward. A reminder that sometimes things are more common than one might expect. Why run yourself to an early grave trying to find a more complex reason when it could be easily thought of as anger, that you sense when you are placed into her mind.” He finished as he stood completely behind the younger man. Hannibal caught that scent of the cologne that Miranda had given Will subtly float off of him and Hannibal hated to admit he started to miss the old aftershave that the other wore. At least with that he could picture Will, with this new cologne all he could see was Miranda and the way she clung on to his arm. Similar to how the cologne clung onto his skin.

Will let out a resentful sigh as he lowered his head, his shoulders slumped and he scratched the back of his head with his index finger. “You might have a point there, maybe I’m just scrambling for something hardier to serve Jack when he turns to me for answers. To feed his appetite for justice while trying to feed my own with the scraps that are left behind.”

"Is there anything you might be able to give Jack to help strive off his hunger, you did mention earlier that Mister Zeller had finally given you all the interview notes. Is there anything in those files that can give insight about her. Maybe understanding these men, she is striking down might reveal something."

"No not really," Will huffed as he began to once again move around the office, "Moore was just like Salazar and Banks. High classed citizen, born with a silver spoon in his mouth and an almost bottomless bank account. A well-known socialite who liked to throw soirees whenever the chance occurred and liked to dabbled in whatever event the high-end world like to throw." Will answered as he stopped by Hannibal's desk and slowly began to swivel the chair.

"By the sound of the profile of these men that she is after, makes one almost worried about their own wellbeing." Hannibal lied; he was no more as worried as the idea of Jack knocking on his house door with an arrest warrant than of this Black Widow. But the things he will be willing to say to keep up appearances, enough to turn his appetite.

Will let out a small dry amused chuckle, "I wouldn't worry too hard Doctor."

"And why is that Will?" *Please enlighten me.*

"Though you share some similarities with the profile, born into wealth and is a member of Baltimore's social elite, you also don't exactly fit into it either. Unlike these men, you carved yourself into the world that they thrive in. With your hard work as a renowned surgeon followed with psychiatry. You are also known for you high taste and knowledge for both art and music, let's not forget your skills in the kitchen that never stop circling the social scene." Will said as he watched the chair loosely swivel with the last of the momentum, he gave it. "That's plenty enough to deter her, you made yourself known with actions that are worth paying attention too, actions that are worth being put on the metaphorical pedestal, these men did not. The men she hunts are best described as," Will let out a breath through nearly shut lips, "assholes." He finished with a loose shrug as he finally returned his attention to Hannibal. Where he caught *that* look, the look that was intentionally poorly hidden, behind sharply entuned facile muscles. Will would call it smug, but the look somehow was above that, with tight slightly drawn up lips and faintly narrowed eyes. The urge to wipe that look off of Lecter's face poked at him like a barbwire stick.

Of course, you already knew all this, you read the profile case. You just wanted someone to preen those peacock feathers of yours and I was foolish enough to step up to the challenge. You smug bastard. Will thought with a click of his tongue and a micro shake of his head, while he turned his attention away from Hannibal. Slightly upset that he failed once again to not fall into one of Hannibal's traps that the doctor liked to set up around the office.

"Glad to know I don't fall on to those lines." Hannibal spoke, with a more pleased smile as he closed his hands together in front of him. While he reveled in the fill that the unintentional complements gave him. Once again taking the opportunity to strike at Will's preoccupied mind and use it to his advantage. He had gotten away with the act the first time when he poked at Will's frustration, then again once that frustration was released. Hannibal liked to see it as a reward towards himself, for putting up with the little bite Will gave him earlier and

to help ease that part of himself that wasn't entirely over the events that took place during the auction.

"Yeah, that makes two of us." Will said with a lulled tone as he watched his fingers trace over the hard curve of the desk chair.

The rest of the session went by in the same manner of that lull that filled Will's voice. The burst of fire had clawed itself out of the profiler had left the office feeling empty between the two. But not in an uncomfortable need to fill the space aspect, it was more of a relief to finally have room to breath aspect. The raw emotion that had filled Will was finally able to be let out in an environment where there were no repercussions, leaving him feeling with a light hollowness in his chest where it was once filled with hot dripping frustration. It had Will wonder what might have happened if he just let that emotion just sit caged in his chest, would it latch onto his ribcage and snap the bones loose. Claw at the wall of muscles, tearing away the flesh before crawling out of the cavern and be greeted by the untouched air. Where it could finally breath and stretch its harden limbs, expand in the open and fully take shape for others to see.

"It looks like our session has come to an end." Will pointed out after looking down at the small clock that sat on top of Hannibal's desk. The place Will decided to anchor himself. Where he would now and then fiddle with pencils and pens that were precisely placed on the desk, before putting them back where he found them. Only the pencil or pen would be slightly misaligned and Hannibal would have to fix it later; something he didn't entirely mind doing.

"So, it has," Hannibal said as he glanced down at his watch then back towards Will, "well as always I hope our little discussion has brought on some light to the predicament you are facing while working this case." Hannibal said with a small tilt of his head and a shadow of a thin smile.

"Yeah, now I know not to go looking for zebras instead keep my eyes open for a horse." Will said with a quick twitch if his lips; a millisecond of smile, and a small disgruntle laugh disguised as a huff.

"Whatever may help in the investigation," Hannibal said with his own version of a smile and a light hidden chuckle, "as always if you need any more helpful insight, I am just a phone call away." Hannibal said as the two slowly began to make their way over to the door. For Hannibal it was to delay the inevitable, he always disliked it when his and Will's session came to an end. How he fantasized about just locking the office doors and keeping Will inside with him, held hostage in his own domain. Then the profiler would be a caged animal for Hannibal to watch as long as he felt fit. For Will on the other hand, he just felt emotionally drained from a long day of going over the several long pages of interview questions and answers, trying to pick up on something that the others might have missed. Then to drive the over an hour-long distance to Hannibal's office where he felt like he was being provoked ever since the older man closed the door to begin their session. He just wanted to go home pour himself a glass of whiskey and unwind in the comfort his dogs brought him. "Do you need me to get that?" Hannibal offered as he reached for the doorknob.

“No, it’s fine I’ve go it.” Will said as he reached and grabbed the doorknob first and that was when Hannibal spotted it. Clasped around Will’s wrist, hidden under his long sleeve for the whole time they had spent together. Under Hannibal’s own sharp eyes, was a very expensive gold and titanium watch that Will definitely did not go out and purchase himself. Hannibal knew Will’s taste in fashion, the man liked things simple and often leaning towards rustic, his abundance of flannels and warm colored sweaters proved his point. Will dressed for comfort and an attempt to blend in with a crowd when needed. This watch that held onto his wrist was the complete opposite of his taste. It was flashy, eye catching, something that Hannibal might grace with a second glance. This watch that clung onto Will’s wrist was clearly not his taste.

“And what is this?” Hannibal asked as he reached down and took Will’s wrist into his hand and slowly brought it closer into his own space. Lifting up Will’s wrist so he could get a better view of the watch. Will just stared, eyes slightly wide at the sudden hold of his person. His brain had frozen for a split second and it was taking its sweet time to thaw out, while he watched as Hannibal held his wrist with such a delicate hold. His long fingers slowly wrapping around his wrist, while he gently twisted his appendage in his hand.

“Uh Miranda gifted me this watch, the other day.” Will managed to finally answer, his voice had become lost for a long moment. Will went to move; adjust his stance, but Hannibal caught the attempt to draw away from him, to give space between the two and he wasn’t going to have it. The older man also shifted his stance as well, maneuvering Will so his back was pressed against the wooden door and Hannibal was standing in front of him. Almost pinning the younger man in place, while he still held onto Will’s wrist with a gentle hold that kept him where Hannibal wanted him to stand.

So, the distasteful act you preformed in the men’s room wasn’t enough Miss Rhettford. You found the need to brand Will as well. Make sure that everyone knows who has laid claim on him even when you are not attached to his side like a starved leech. Did I really threaten the world you are trying to build for Will and yourself, that much so with my own presence, that you felt the need to go out of your way to find away to mark him with your wealth. If you still want to play this game, this battle, I am always looking forward to a good stimulating challenge.

“It’s quite a tasteful accessory.” Hannibal said voice flat and eyelids slightly hooded as he continued to look over the watch. His thumb grazing over the face and soon to ridges of the metal straps. Now and then brushing against the tender flesh of Will’s wrist, where he was rewarded with the quick drumbeats of the younger man’s raising heartbeat. Along with the small amount of goosebumps that were left behind by the trail of Hannibal’s thumb. *I wonder Will, what would happen if I just snapped your wrist right here and now, you seem so quiet in my touch. It wouldn’t be that hard to just apply the right amount of pressure married with well-placed forced and snap your wrist will be in two. Would you scream right away or would it take your mind a few moments of recognition to realize what had just happen. Only then would you become aware of the hot white pain filtering in, then would you finally be able to break through the barrier that closed off your vocal cords and fill this office with such a beautiful sound. While you processed the pain would I slowly slip off this watch and crush it under my foot, maybe then I would tend to your wound. Only, after I had my fill on the sweet of your scream.*

“Thanks.” Will’s voice was low as he tried to split his attention from Hannibal’s warm touch on his wrist, to the odd flickering that now started to spark itself to life in his chest. It reminded him of a lighter that tried to produce a flame with each quick flick of the spark wheel. What strong fire lay waiting underneath the flicker that played inside his chest and what type of heat would it produce. Will could not understand the odd sensation that decided to rear itself to him once more, or why he wasn’t fighting to extinguish this attempt at a flame.

“You’re welcome,” Hannibal’s voice was just as low, but it held a husk to it. He flicked his eyes from the watch and up towards Will’s and for split second deceitful maroon met stormy blue, before Will quickly darted away from the hold that those eyes threatened him with. “Tell me, Will do you and Miranda have any plans coming up anytime soon?” Hannibal asked as he slowly let go of Will’s wrist and watch as the other retracked it back to himself. A part of Will started to miss the uncalled-for hold that Hannibal had given him. To feel those skillful fingers still holding onto his wrist, that birthed that odd flicker in the first place.

“Yeah, this Friday night, Miranda and I are planning on watching another old classic together at her place. Our own little movie night.” Will began as he fought the urge to rub his wrist. “We want to start a sort of habit out of it, enjoying a movie together every Friday night ” Will answered with slight unease woven into his voice as his eyes roamed around Hannibal. “Basic couple stuff.”

"I hope you two can enjoy this new habit you want to start.”

“Thanks, and actually it was Miranda’s idea in the first place, I just liked the idea of having something to look forward to at the end of the week.” Will said nonchalantly with a weak smile to match.

“Either way I hope you two enjoy.” Hannibal lied. While he pushed down the shimmering tar that slowly rose up his throat, coating his vocal cords with its viscous substance. Where it had him holding back his own silver tongue.

Chapter End Notes

Well it's official Will Graham is a sugar baby....lol

All is Fair

Chapter Summary

Hannibal was not going to let Miranda little play of the watch go unnoticed. What better way to show one's knowledge of time then to take it from another.

Chapter Notes

Happy Valentine's Day everyone.
Here is a new chapter, I hope you all enjoy. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The laptop closed with a not so satisfying *click*, as Will let out a frustrated sigh. He had spent the last two hour and a half going over the interview sheets, trying to find something hidden amongst the vague details that were remembered by the drunken party goers. The list of past lovers was thrown to the side to make room in his mind in favor of the retailing of Benedict's last birthday celebration. It was almost rewarding to finally put that list away, now Will could recalibrate on what to look for when trying to place together how this Black Window worked. To see how she came off to other's and not what he picked up when he slipped inside her mind after her kill.

The interviews sadly did not reveal much on her, but then again what was Will expecting when he went over the notes. Those who could recall the night held a mixture of memories of what Benedict was doing while the party went on, they were so lost in the euphoria that a lavish party brought them, they all admitted to not really caring what the man of the hour was up to. They also did not show any sympathy for the man's death, if anything they seemed more upset over the idea of not being able to attended another one of his parties; apparently just like the two other victims Benedict had a reputation for the parties he would throw. Even his wife; now widow, showed no remorse for her husband's passing, going as far as to show her relief towards his death. Stating in the interview that she had known all about his little bad habit of running off with any women who would just as much bat their eyelashes his way. That the love they might have shared died long ago and she just refused to cut the ties with him because she found a sort of sick amusement in watching him squirm uncomfortably in their marriage. It was clear that Benedict would not be missed.

Going back over to what the witness' could recall during the evening, those who were able to dig up some intel of what Benedict was doing, was only a handful. They had remembered seeing the man talking with a singular woman throughout the whole night. Which they all thought was odd, because Benedict had a need to be extremely social, he would often bounce

from person to person, group to group. He hardly ever stuck with one singular person longer than a couple of minutes. Apparently besides being extremely social, he also got extremely bored when it came to conversating with others. If the person he was talking to didn't hold up a strong enough conversation the man would just leave that interaction and not bother to even reinitiate conversation with that person for the rest of the night. So, to see Benedict with a singular woman for so long during the party was a bit jarring for some of the guests, it also ment that Benedict was most likely going to try and get that woman to sleep with him.

But when pressed on what the woman looked like, that was when all things began to fall apart for the investigation. Not one of the guests could give a feasible identification for the woman, just like with the motel managers the Black Widow managed to be elusive during her time in public with the victim. Making sure to only talk with Benedict when he was alone and always making sure to face away from the crowds. When asked for something or anything that could help identify her, they all seemed to agree with two details and they were that this woman had long brown maybe black hair, it all depended on the lighting and she might have been younger than him; the key word might, which racked itself against the semi established profile of the Black Widow. How young should they look for when it came to searching for this woman.

How did you manage to gain the attention from such a fickle attention span like Benedict's? Will thought to himself as he leaned forward to prop his elbow on to his desk. *The man was known for his attitude towards those who could not hold his attention, if you couldn't keep it, you were not worth his time. He had the picky attention span of a child; others needed a shiny object to wave in front of him. Put on juggling acts and here you were able to latch your talons around it and not let go. How exactly did you know what to say or do to get him this close to you. To keep him focused on you and you alone?*

A hard buzz jostled Will out of his trail of thoughts, he began to scan his desk for where the buzz came from. Locating his phone under a pile of student papers that he had managed to get graded before he had to return his focus back on to the case. Even though Will got the impression that Jack liked to believe all of his brain power belonged to his never ending want to deliver justice. The profiler still had a day job to accomplish if he wanted to continue to pay his bills. Will checked to see who might have been the one to decide to contact him out of the blue, a part of him expected it to be Miranda just to see how things were going with him and confirming their plans for the movie night. But instead, he was slightly taken back to see the actual identity of the person sending him the message.

'Good evening Will, I hope I'm not disrupting your work.'

'Hello Hannibal, no you're not disrupting anything. In fact, I just finished up some work, about to head home. Why?'

'That's good to know I wasn't interrupting anything, because I am in need of your expertise with something that has just came up.'

"So, what exactly happened here?" Will asked as he stood in the middle of Hannibal's kitchen, one arm loosely wrapped around his torso while his other hand laid against his mouth. All while he stared at the puzzle he was politely asked to come over and help solve.

“You see, I was in the middle of organizing my kitchen, getting it prepared for tomorrows dinner party, that I am throwing for a few old colleagues of mine,” Hannibal began as he too stared at the puzzle, he had contacted Will over. “And in doing so my Dutch oven had slipped from my hand and landed crudely on my sink’s faucet handle.” Hannibal finished as he watched as Will walked over from where he stood at Hannibal’s side, to get a better look at the now busted faucet. He picked up the stainless-steel lever and began to turn it over in his hand. The lever was bent at a crude odd angle, no longer able to be reattached to the body of the faucet. The damage had left it useless. Will set down the lever to look to where it once was held. He could easily picture how much water must have burst through the break, nearly soaking the floor and counter top. It must have been like a mini guizer erupting for a good few seconds, before Lecter could turn the shut off knob under the sink. “I called a repair man before contacting you, but due to the sudden circumstances and late hour, I was told they wouldn’t be able to come down and fix it until late tomorrow. By then it would be near impossible to fully,”

“I understand.” Will said cutting Hannibal off as he leaned away from the sink and walked back over to his portable toolbox, that sat on the kitchen island. The dented black metal box stood out on the pristine kitchen counter like a sore thumb. Much how Will sometimes felt every time he entered the older man’s own domain. Hannibal reflected his house, well-polished, put together, and nothing out of placed. Where Will reflected his own, held together with creaking nails and in need of a fresh coat of paint. They were oil and water it felt like sometimes.

“You believe you can fix this predicament I have found myself in?” Hannibal asked as he turned and walked over to Will so he could peer over his shoulder. Watching as Will dug through the dingy old toolbox that dared to invade the unblemished system, he held his kitchen to. Their bodies nearly pressed together; Hannibal could feel the natural warmth that radiated off the other. How easy it would be for him to just lean in further and place his arms on either side of Will, trapping the younger man where he stood with no place to go, but towards him. The idea caused the possessive beast that stirred to life when ever Will was near him to let out a faint purr in approval.

“Yeah, it shouldn’t be too hard, it’s not the first faucet I had to replace.” Will mumbled, too focused on planning out what his next step should be in order to help Lecter solve the issue he faced. To realize the intimate closeness Hannibal tapped him in.

“Replace?” Hannibal asked with right amount of shock in his voice to fake concern. He knew the damage he had caused when he had raised the small second-hand Dutch oven, he had bought prior that day to enact his scheme. He was willing to inflict damage to his sink; that was his goal, but he would not risk any damage to his own personal kitchen equipment. There were a few lines he just could not cross.

“Sadly yes, it’s not going to be a simple go down to the hardware store and by a new lever. We are going to have to replace the whole thing.” Will said with a sigh as he began to align the tools, he’ll need for the job out on the counter. Lecter was very vague when he had explained his issue over their shared texts. Not really giving him a straight answer to what he would be facing when he agreed to come over. He had just told Will that he faced a problem with his sink and could use his help. Giving Will enough insight to have him stopping by his

house to grab his toolbox and get his dogs situated before heading over to Lecter's. "I've actually broken my own faucet in a similar manner before," Will continued as he closed his toolbox, "I just finished cleaning one of my smaller cast iron skillets, well the heavy son of bitch just slipped out of my hand and welp, I was in need of a new faucet." Will chuckled lightly at the memory.

"I'm surprised you didn't need a new sink."

"I guess some luck was on my side," Will said as he turned to Hannibal, a little caught off at the once again close proximity the doctor managed to achieve without his knowledge. The close proximity that Hannibal presented himself in, should have caused an irksome effect of the profiler. But Will could not brig that negative feeling to fully develop, not when another feeling dared to take its place. The same feeling that was born only a week ago. A feeling he still could not grasp at its whole, that slipped through his hands like coarse sand. That once again decided to rear its distorted head and taunted him to his core, as it bathed in his confusion. "But um it shouldn't take that long, a few hours at the most." Will managed to say as he tried to regain his composer without looking like he was regaining his composer.

"That's good to know." Hannibal said in a low voice as he studded Will's face with a soft expression. The way those sharp features could just melt with ease always memorized Will in some far-off way that he could never understand. Maybe it was because he was so used to seeing Lecter held tightly together, presenting himself with highly regarded aroura it was easy to forget that the man could come off as anything else.

"Uhm, yeah it is," Will choked out as he maneuvered himself away from Hannibal's looming body and into a more open space., giving himself room to breathe. "We should probably head over to the nearest hardware store and pick you out a new faucet." Will quickly stated as he walked over to the doorway with his hands in his pockets and head slightly ducked.

"Very well." Hannibal said not even trying to hide the smirk that claimed his face as he watched Will quickly turn the corner.

"Ever thought about maybe buying one of those touchless faucets?" Will asked as he lazily pushed the cart, leaning fully into the handle bar as the two strolled down the empty aisle. The hardware store they stopped by was practically deserted when they walked in, now and again a dad and his kid might walk around the corner, or someone who looked like they dropped what they were in the middle of doing to make a quick errand run would pop up. But that was about it, if it wasn't for the occasional spotting of another living being, one might assume the store was abandoned. "I mean with all the cooking you do it might come in handy, you'll be even more efficient than you already are." Will continued as he looked up at Hannibal, waiting for the other's opinion. "You'd be unstoppable." He sent the man a crooked smile and Hannibal quirked his lip. "It's just a thought." Will added before he continued to stroll leisurely down the aisle.

"I haven't really thought much on it to be perfectly honest," Hannibal began as he matched Will's leisurely speed, eyes slowly looking over the different models that sat propped around them. "Wasn't really planning on purchasing a new faucet today. So, you'll have to excuse me if I spend a lot of time contemplating on my final decision." Hannibal stopped at one of

the models; one of the more high-end faucets that was mat black with a pull-out spray nozzle, and began to go over it with scrutinizing eyes.

“That’s understandable,” Will said with a lazy shrug as he abandoned the cart to stand by the other man, “it’s your kitchen after all.” He said as he reached out to run his fingers over the curve of the faucet. Not really caring for the way the metal felt under his skin.

“And if it was yours?” Hannibal asked looking over at Will with a raised eyebrow.

“I’d look into buying a touchless.” Will said his lips pulled into a soft straight line with nonchalant shrug. Evidence to the slight playfulness he was letting Hannibal see for a few seconds, before he turned on his heals and began to walk away from the sink display. “But like I said it’s your kitchen after all.”

“That you did, but I also asked for your own opinion.” Hannibal pointed out as he turned to keep his sights on Will, who had made his way over to the other side of the aisle. To look over a sleeker stainless-steel faucet, that looked similar to the one Hannibal purposely broke.

“That you also did and I gave you what you asked for,” Will said as he squatted down and pulled out one of the boxes and began to go over the details about the appliance. “In the end though it’ll be your decision.” Will kept his attention on the box, while Hannibal kept his attention on Will. The fact he would be spending a good portion of his time in this dreary hardware store, looking over faucets, and trying to filter out which one would be suitable for his kitchen. It all should have been grating at his nerves. He should be somewhat upset with the idea of having to spend money on a new kitchen appliance he never faced the need to purchase. But the peculiar thing was that he didn’t feel at all upset at the aspect. Because as of the moment all Hannibal saw was how his plan was coming into fruition. He had captured Will’s time, with something that did not revolve around the twisted world that he lived in and that Will found himself visiting so often.

“Do you have any ideas on what you might be looking for?” Will asked as he slid the box back onto the shelf and adjusted his stance. Putting one knee to the floor and putting all his weight on the appendage, before turning his attention and looking up at Hannibal.

Of course, I know what I’m looking for my dear Will, I always know what I seek to find and what I seek is kneeling down at my feet as we speak.

“Like I’ve stated before I didn’t really have the time to give much consideration into what I might want in this new faucet.” Hannibal said as he looked away from Will to look around the handful of displays and his attention was quickly caught when he noticed a man; roughly around Will’s age, walk down the aisle that he and Will solely occupied. Hannibal easily noticed how the man’s eyes, once dull with the only thing on his mind was whatever dreary task he needed to complete, suddenly lit up with interest when they landed on the unsuspecting Will. His eyes sharpen with intrigue as they roamed over the profiler, taking in all of his appearance and Hannibal caught the pull of the stranger’s lips as he had decided he enjoyed what he was looking at. Hannibal was not at all the surprised that Will once again had managed to catch another’s eye, without even realizing it. The profiler’s mind was far too occupied with the task at hand, as he reached over and pulled out yet another box to go over the information it had to off. To even notice the hungry stare that settled over him.

“Well, take all the time you need, I’m in no rush.” Will said as he examined the box, “just don’t let the term spot resistance fool you. It’s like those pans that advertise themselves as nonstick. All a bunch of hog wash if you ask me.” Will added, not realizing that his words were landing on deaf ears. While Hannibal kept his eyes on the man, who continued to look over at Will with hunger in his eyes. Only did that hunger vanish from the stranger’s eyes, when Hannibal maneuvered himself skillfully to be included in his view of Will. The stranger’s eyes traveled up the casually well-dressed man, with a look that held the question. On who might be dumb enough to block his vision on what was the only eye-catching thing in the aisle and were met with hard eyes that spoke words of claim over the man, who took residence on the floor. The two men exchanged looks, Hannibal could see a flash of a challenge in the other man’s eyes and a part of Hannibal wanted that stranger to act on the feeling. To see what would happen if this man, who dared to cast Will a wanting glance while he was in his presence decided to play into the unsavory feeling. It was an opportunity to release that possessive beast that Hannibal kept on a tight chain. To turn it on someone, on a surrogate, a stand in for what he wished he could do to Miranda. Even though the relief that would follow the act would be welcoming, Hannibal knew it would never last long, as long as Miranda was still in Will’s life. Hannibal had to keep the chain pulled tight until the time strike in his favor and he could feel those chains run through his grip and the predator took its freedom with greed.

But this stranger knew his place in Hannibal’s stare, and the man quickly darted his eyes away and coward into the other end of the aisle, leaving Hannibal with another smirk of triumph for the second time that day. But that smirk faltered for a second when the man sadly wasn’t done testing the obvious boundaries that Hannibal had set up around Will. The man casted Will one more glance, probably trying to sketch his features to memory and Hannibal was not going to let that man have the attempt. Once again, he found himself maneuvering himself into the view, ruining the picture the man was desperately trying to commit to memory.

“Whoa!” Will suddenly let out, followed by a well-rounded thump and Hannibal’s attention from the objective at hand was turned back to Will. Who was now sitting on the side of his hip and slowly propping himself up with his hands. As he regained himself from the accidental bump that caused him to lose his balance.

“My apologies Will,” Hannibal began as he bent down and reached out towards Will, surprised with himself. Wondering how he could have let the stumble happen in the first place. Was he really that lost in his own possessive attribute to lose track of his own surroundings? “Let me help you up.” Will took the offered hand with a strong grip and pushed himself off the floor, while Hannibal pulled him towards himself.

“It’s no problem,” Will said as he regained his balance, “I should have gotten off the floor a while ago.” Will said as he let go of the other’s hand in favor to straighten himself out, not paying much attention to how Hannibal’s hand had rested on the side of his upper arm.

“Why don’t we go look over those touchless faucets you sung so much praise over.” Hannibal smiled. While he turned Will to the other end of the aisle and once again Will did not notice the placement of Hannibal’s hand. When it left his upper arm and now laid claim to settle on the curve of his lower back. As he followed Will to where he pointed out the

options of faucets from earlier when they first walked down the aisle. He looked over his shoulder as they walked to their destination, back at the man who still infested the aisle and narrowed his eyes at the stranger for a split second. The man once again quickly looked away and turned his attention to the products in front him. The edge of Hannibal's lips curled subtly upwards at the man's cowardness, before he released the stranger of his attention and returned it back to Will.

Will set the box down heavily on the island counter, with a huff as he also set down the paper bag that held what else was needed to complete the job. Before turning his attention over to his toolbox and double checked to make sure he had all the proper equipment. Another sign of luck on his side when he came to the conclusion that he indeed had all he needed to complete the job.

"Now it might take me more time than I originally estimated to install the faucet," Will stated as he cut open the box with his own personal box cutter that he kept in his toolbox and he began to search for the instructional guide. "Only because it's a touchless, so it might call for more specific steps that need to be taken." Will informed as he pulled out the guide and began to flip though the laminated booklet, as he subconsciously leaned forward into the island. Sliding slowly from the lack of friction, only stopping when his chest met the edge.

"Understandable, projects like the one we are facing tend to take a great deal of time," Hannibal commented as he entered the kitchen adjusting his sleeves, "so, if you find that you need more, I completely." Hannibal trailed off when he laid sight on the position Will stood in. The way his lean body curved downward, creating a natural deep arch in his back. How Hannibal faced the urge to slowly run his hand down the curve, nearly overwhelmed him. To feel how the younger man's spine dipped down with blatant easy and follow that ramp until it ended on the enticingly round behind that filled out Will's pants, utterly perfectly. Mesmerized by the subtle swing of Will's hips as he adjusted his footing, to where one of his ankles hooked over the other one. Making the sight even more alluring for the cannibal, to the point he ran the tip of his tongue over his lips as he drank in the sight.

You once again found yourself in the grace of madam luck tonight my dear Will, Hannibal thought as he ingrained the pose Will was in, to memory. *For if it wasn't for the tight leash I have on my own self-control. There would be nothing stopping me from claiming you here and now in my kitchen. To bathe in the moans that would erupt from that beautiful throat of yours while our bodies became one in the fountain of passion. That could only be birthed from both ourselves combined in the act of sexual desire. What a sight we would paint, you bent over this very island, where I have prepared the meticulous sought out flesh of another human being countless times. Your face the perfect picture of pleasure, while I bury myself deep….*

"What was that?" Will asked as his eyes left the booklet in favor of the only other living being in the kitchen. "You kinda trailed off there." He pointed out, even angling one of his fingers that held the booklet to point at the doctor. Hannibal easily gathered himself, tucking away the fantasy for another time to reminisce over.

"I was saying that if you find yourself in need of more time than you thought, I completely understand." Hannibal said with an eased smile and quirk of his head and Will just nodded in

agreement.

“Alright, because after studying these instructions, it might take me maybe an hour or more than I originally thought.” He said with a sigh as he placed the booklet down and to Hannibal’s displeasure, straightened himself out. He looked down at his watch and let out another sigh as he gathered the time. “I’ll need to send Miranda a quick text,” Will spoke as he looked up at Hannibal, “telling her I probably won’t be able to join her for movie night.” He spoke.

“I forgot you two were trying to start that little ritual,” Hannibal lied, “I hate for you to miss out on my account.” Hannibal said with the right amount of fake guilt to come off as believable. Even adding a slight hand press to his own chest to help sell the act.

“No, no its fine. I’m pretty sure Miranda will understand.” Will said with a shake of his head as he pulled out his phone and began to quickly type out a massage. “I’ll just quickly explain what happened and that we’ll just have to try again next time.” Will said as he finished the last of his message to Miranda and set down his phone next to his toolbox. “Besides you’re in more need of a working sink than I am of a movie night.” Will added with a shrug, before he turned his attention to Hannibal’s sink. Missing the pleased smile that captured the other’s face.

Hannibal leaned leisurely against the counter; arms loosely crossed as his eyes rested on the visible lower half of Will. Who was laying on his back with the top half of himself hidden under the kitchen sink. They had set themselves up in this position for the better half of over an hour or more. Hannibal didn’t really care to keep track of the time as long as he had something enticing occupying his mind. “I find myself in need to thank you again Will,” Hannibal spoke as he shifted his stance, “for taking time out of your day to come and help me.”

“It’s no issue.” Will spoke his voice raised slightly, so it could travel out from the cabinet, and Hannibal watched as one of Will’s hands reached out from the nook he laid in and blindly searched around the floor. Traveling over the several tool’s he needed to replace the faucet, brushing lightly over a few, before settling over the one he needed and Hannibal watched as the hand retreated back inside the cabinet. “Better than having some stranger come into your home and trying to haggle you into spending more money than needed.” Will said through gritted teeth and Hannibal watched as Will had raised his midsection off the ground, once again presenting to Hannibal with the perfect arch his body could make. Unknowingly teasing the beast that watched over him, waving a piece of raw steak in front of the tiger’s cage, without realizing it. “Who more than likely would have tried to get you to buy an appliance you didn’t even need in the first place.”

“Like how you managed to talk me into purchasing this touchless faucet?” Will scooted himself from out under the sink and once again was met with Hannibal’s smug look. As the man leaned further into the counter.

“For your information, I suggested the touchless faucet,” Will sat up and placed his arms on his bent knees, “emphasis on suggested. Especially when you kept reminding me that you and I quote 'didn’t really have the time to give much consideration into what I might want in this new faucet.’” Will smirked, “I also recall that I too kept mentioning how it was your

kitchen in the end and how it was going to be your decision in the end to make." He added baiting Hannibal to retaliate with the blatant fact he had just produced in front of him. But Hannibal did not move his stance and just simply raised his eyebrow as if asking Will if he was done with the small tangent. Will just let out a little huff and rolled his eyes at the act. "Fine stay all high and mighty, I have a job to do." He mumbled as he lowered himself back onto the kitchen floor and slid himself back into the cabinet, in order to escape that smug face Hannibal seemed to love to wear around him.

"None the less, I am still grateful." Hannibal said as he continued to watch over Will.

"Like I said before, it's no issue on my end." Will said as he twisted himself for a second, before straightening himself out again. "Just happy that I can be of any help." He added once again through gritted teeth. "It's odd, but there is something nice about being needed for something other than my empathy."

"You are often seen for one aspect of yourself Will, by others on an almost daily notion. It's very rational to feel a sort of delight when that attention is directed to another part of your character." Hannibal heard Will let out a dry short chuckle.

"I didn't know I was partaking in another session doctor," Will said as he angled himself, so he was peering out from under the sink and was looking up at Hannibal. "Is there anything else you want to discuss. Should I drop everything, so we could continue this conversation in a more suitable area. Somewhere, where I am not under your sink?"

Hannibal held his head like he was contemplating the words Will had just spoke, obviously putting on a show for the other. "No, there is no need for that," Hannibal finally spoke, as he leaned away from the counter and Will watched through narrow eyes as he walked around him, to stand on the other end of the island. "This isn't another one of your sessions Will. I am more than contempt with the little insight I gave you and I am more than happy to leave it at that." Will stared at Hannibal with a blank look and Hannibal tilted his head, egging him on to speak whatever might be running through his head.

"Alright." Will all but scoffed, before straightening himself out and continued with his job.

A few more minutes had passed, the only sound that came out of the kitchen was from what Will was doing. Along with the occasional footsteps Hannibal made, whenever he decided he needed to move around, or else he might find himself lost in watching Will work. That was until a factory set ring tone filled the space, catching both men off guard.

"Of course," Will grunted, "out of all the times my phone has to go off."

"Don't worry, I'll get it for you." Hannibal spoke as he reached over to where Will's phone vibrated hectically on the island counter.

"If it's Jack, tell him I fell victim to the Ripper and can't come in," Will called out, "not until Monday at least…Maybe." Hannibal suppressed his own noise of amusement at the quip, but he couldn't hold back the playful smile that crossed his features.

You have no idea how close you are to the truth. Hannibal thought as he looked over to Will, "Duly noted." Was all he said before hitting the answer icon. "Hello, I'm must inform you that Will cannot come to the phone at moment," Hannibal answered, just in time for the nose to pick up, causing him to leave the kitchen for the more solitary dining room. "But I'll be more than happy to relay a message to him."

"Well, well, well, isn't this a surprise." Came the silky voice of Miranda.

"Miss. Rhettford, and what do I owe the pleasure of this call." Hannibal spoke, with a tinge of intrigue laced in his tone.

"I should be asking the same thing Doctor Lecter. After all this is *my* darling Will's phone that you are answering." Hannibal did not miss the emphasis on the word 'my', in fact the way she managed to have the word roll off her tongue. The possessive claim around the word had the tasteless emotion that was satisfied with Will's presence begin to awake from its hibernation.

"That it is, but Will is preoccupied at the moment and asked if I could answer the call for him." It wasn't a complete lie that he had told. Will was busy as they spoke, but Will did not ask for Hannibal to pick up his phone, that was something he chose to offer. But Miranda did not need to know that, let her believe in the subtle line of domestic behavior the two of them might share.

"That was awfully nice of you to do for him. After all he is the one fixing *your* sink at the moment."

"I'd like to believe so," Hannibal said as he ran his finger over one of his dining chairs and began to look out the large back doors into his back yard. Ignoring once again Miranda's attempt to bring out some form a guilt from him, too bad for her, Hannibal caged and buried that emotion a long time ago. To the point where hell would have to freeze over, before he even felt a feathers touch of guilt ever again. "May I ask why you called?" He asked as his eyes followed a fallen leaf's decent from the tree, as it danced in the wind before colliding to the ground.

"Oh, I just wanted to see how things were going, checking in and what not." Miranda answered before she let out a dramatic sigh, "it was an odd coincident after all. That your sink just so happens to suddenly need fixing on the one day that Will and I have our movie date planed in advance." Her tone spoke volumes, even though her voice remained calm.

"You are quite right," Hannibal said as he turned away from the doors and began to circle around the dining table. "What an unexpected aliment of circumstances that laid out in front of us."

"Yes, it's crazy how these circumstances just align," Miranda hummed "but then again, just hypothetically. What if the circumstances didn't just fall into place like they did, what if another hand decided to guide them to where they sat. How unusual that would be, don't you think?"

“Yes, how unusual that would be.” *So, you are not as blind as most would be to this act. Once again proving that this little game might be worth my time after all.*

“Yes, perhaps I’ll just have to rearrange my schedule next week, that way Will and I can make up our time missed.” Hannibal could feel that little statement lead up to something, he knew Miranda wouldn’t reveal anything about the two’s relationship life. He knew he couldn’t guide it out of her, like he could with Will. With Miranda he had to decipher the code that she spoke to him in. “Speaking of time, you are a man of luxury taste Doctor Lecter. Tell me, what were your thoughts on my Will’s new watch?” There it was, a reminder of why Will was in his house in the first place, a reminder of who had already laid claim to him, before Hannibal could.

“It is a nice accessory, far from dear Will’s usual style, but something told be you knew that.” How Hannibal pictured himself “accidently” letting that accessory fall down the drain, while the garbage disposal was set on high. Of course, that would mean he’d find himself in the predicament of asking for Will’s hand once again. It would be the best of both worlds for the killer.

There was a light laugh on the other end of the line, before Miranda spoke. “You have me there don’t you. Then again, I do have a habit of purchasing Will lavish gifts.” How easily it was for Hannibal to picture the fang filled smile painted on Miranda’s lips as she spoke. “And something tells me this new accessory to Will’s wardrobe might be a correlation to why your sink suddenly needs fixing.” Once again Hannibal was intrigued, by the sharp wit Miranda revealed to him. “But then again this is all speculation in way, one might hope someone wouldn’t scoop to such an act.”

“Like how someone might hope, that one might not scoop to such an act of spending an abundant amount of money on another person, who is obviously not use to such an act. Pulling them out of their comfort zone with such a harsh grip. All in a way to prove one’s structure in their relationship.” Hannibal said, “It could be seen as an indication to the way they feel unstable in their relationship as a whole. That it’s not as strong as they might hope it could be. Is that why you spend so much on Will, to prove to yourself and possibly to him that you are truly dedicated to the relationship and that you are a not easily threatened by others, who might encroach your space?”

The silence on the other end of the line spoke at such a volume, it had Hannibal wishing he could harvest the non-existing sound. To later on enjoy the feeling that washed over him, when he had successfully clipped Miranda’s tongue.

“That’s some conclusional jumping you did there *Lecter*.” The smirk that played at his lips was just as searing as the poisonous fire that surrounded his last name.

“Dropping formality so soon Miss Rhettford?”

“It was just a slip of the tongue Doctor Lecter,” Miranda answered, whatever fire that peeked through her words, was non-existent. As if a switch had been flipped, Hannibal had struck a nerve and had caused her to go on the defensive. To switch over to a persona that could take the lashing truth that he was able to give. “It was bound to happen at one point or another, but I’m all too pleased to inform you that the structural integrity of Will’s and I relationship is

still growing and if the conversation that Will and I shared the other night is of any indication on where we are," there was a pause, "then I like to believe that our relationship is becoming stronger by the day. So that little spiel you did there to try and shake the grounds and cause havoc to our structure that we have step up, I'm more than happy to tell you it was all in vain."

"I wasn't trying to disturb the structural integrity of yours and Will's relationship." Hannibal said as he leaned against the dining table, to where his body was angled, so he could catch a glimpse of Will. Who had slid out of from under the sink, just so he could stretch his back before he went back to the task at hand. Reminding him of his accomplishment, of ridding Miranda of Will's time. "If that is what you gathered from my own observation, then that must say more about your character than it does mine." Once again Hannibal was bestowed the gift of deserved silence from the other end of the phone. As he waited for whatever come back Miranda felt like she needed to give him.

"That it might," that was not what Hannibal expected to hear from the sharply worded woman, the same woman who proved to him that she could not back down easily when it came to wanting to be on top of a conversation. She was playing at something once again, what could possibly be going through her mind at the moment, while Hannibal waited for her to answer. "Then again what I have gathered from our little interactions we shared also speaks volumes of your character as well. So, it seems we are both showing sides to the other without our complete knowledge." Miranda's tone was flat.

"And what pray tell have you gathered about my character. If you don't mind me asking."

"To reveal what I truly gathered, would be to lose what grounds I stand on in this little game we have seem to have locked ourselves into." Hannibal did not respond to the blatant reveal of the game that, he believed was on unspoken words between the two. To bring it out into the open, gave the game a certain dullness to it. And here he thought of Miranda doing so well, with keeping everything under the table. Yet maybe that was what Miranda wanted, to have the game lose that edge of interest, that way he might become less incline to put up a proper strategy plan. If that was the case once again Miranda was sadly mistaken. It only sharpened his thoughts towards the next step in the game.

"But anyway," Miranda breathed, "I have to get going, now that my Friday has found itself open. I've found myself incline to put that time into my work." Miranda spoke, "We both know you won't be relaying any message I give you to tell my darling Will. So, let's just keep this conversation between the two of us shall we doctor. No need to drag him into this little scrabble we are having." Once again to his distaste Hannibal found himself agreeing with Miranda.

"Understandable, I guess this is where we part ways."

"You'd be right, have a nice night, Doctor Lecter."

"You as well Miss Rhettford." With that Hannibal hung up the phone, with a breath as he gazed around the dining room. *Now that we both understand the game, we have locked ourselves into participating in, what are your next steps, Miss Rhettford? What move will you make and what move shall I counter with?* Hannibal thought to himself as he leaned away

from the table and casually walked back into the kitchen, erasing the phone call from the call log. Just in time for Will to pull himself out from under the sink.

“So, who was it?” Will asked as he set down his wrench and sat up, placing his arms on top of his bent knees. Looking up just as Hannibal set down his phone. The other man had a dull look to his express, the conversation must have sucked some sort of extraverted energy out of him to cause such an expression. “Was it Jack, does he need me to come in for some late-night investigating?” He asked with a tilt of his head and a raise of his eyebrows. Hoping the answer was either a no or that Hannibal had managed to talk the agent out of having Will come in during his off time.

“No, it wasn’t Crawford.”

He’s using last names, whoever was on the other end must have ruffled his feathers to some kind of degree. Should I press the matter or wait for Lecter to speak his mind? But then again when has Lecter ever spoke his mind in his life, the man lives to speak in metaphors and riddles. I’d be surprised if he could actually have a straight forward conversation with anyone, especially me.

“If not Jack than who would be calling me out of the blue?” Will asked deciding not to wait to see if Hannibal would decide to continue on with his vague answers.

“Who indeed,” Hannibal said as he leaned against the counter, “but in reality, it was just one of those pesky toll-free numbers.”

“You spent all your time on a toll-free number?” Will questioned, his eyes slightly narrowed as he tried to convince himself, that Hannibal might be telling him the truth.

Hannibal shrugged at the question, “I figured if they wanted to waste my time, why not return the favor.” He answered with a smile that showed off the jagged points of his teeth, with a mischievous glint in his eyes. Will could easily, see Hannibal doing something like that with the annoying phone scammers, who decided to call the wrong number. Dragging the caller on the other end for as long as he could get away with until the person would eventually give up on the crime, just so they could keep their sanity. And Hannibal loved to pull at one’s own sanity when ever given the opportunity to do so. But something deep inside Will’s mind told him that this wasn’t the case, Hannibal had held himself wrong when he entered the kitchen. No, whoever was on the other end managed to get under his skin in such a fine way that it had left him near the edge of irritation. It could have been a more irksome caller than what he was use too, but what if it wasn’t. Will quickly pushed that feeling to the side, chalking it up to himself over thinking from such a long week and now his mind was trying to latch on to something else, to a different mystery to solve. So, would it be that bad to just fain ignorance this one time in order to give his mind some space.

“I guess we all deal, with those guys in our own way,” Will let out a breath as he began to look around the kitchen, “me, I just hang up and block the number, just so they don’t have the chance to call me again.”

“Yes, in our own way.” Hannibal could tell Will decided to believe in the lie, that he chose out of his own quizzical thoughts to believe him at his own words. A part of Hannibal was

pleased with the fact that Will was willing to put aside his speculation towards him in order to keep whatever atmosphere they had built during their time together. But another part of Hannibal wanted Will to question him further on the subject and not give in so easily to the lie. Hannibal knew though that part could not receive what it wanted, not when it came to the secretive game, he and Miranda were a part of. Then that would just ruin all the fun in the end. If Will ever found out, then who knows what the outcome might be, Hannibal could think of a list of conclusions just on the top of his head. But that didn't mean Will would oblige to that list, he was very unpredictable in that notion after. A trait Hannibal quite enjoyed.

"So, how's the process with my new faucet coming along?" Hannibal asked leaning away from the counter to stand by the sink, looking over the shine of the new stainless-steel metal. As it held a morphed version of his reflection in its curve.

"Glad you asked," Will said as he got up from the floor, "I was just about to come and get you, before you walked in. To let you know that I just finished." Will smiled, putting both hands on his hips, "Why don't you give it a go." He said stepping a little bit back and gestured with his hand. Hannibal raised an eyebrow and flicked his eyes over to the new faucet, before he glided his wrist across the sensor and watched as water flowed. Will smiled as the warm feeling of accomplishment washed over his cool nerves, as he took in the sight of his handy work in action.

"I must say," Hannibal said as he turned the tempter and tested as the water grew hot then switched it over to cold and once again tested the water. Before gliding his wrist over the sensor again to shut it off. "I'm impressed with your handy work, you managed to accomplish a task I was more than ready to pay a professional to do." Hannibal said with a pleased smile as he held his arms behind his back, while he looked over the faucet.

"Don't sound so surprised." Will chuckled drily as he began to pack his tools, reminding Hannibal of his jagged ability to receive complements. Hannibal turned away from his new faucet, in favor of studying Will, as the younger man packed his things. An indication that he would soon be biding the man a farewell for the night and Hannibal was not yet done feasting on Will's time. He still felt that blunt hunger that festered inside him, that demanded for more.

"Leaving so soon?" Hannibal asked and Will just shrugged as he worked to place the last of his tools in his toolbox.

"You have a working faucet now," Will looked over his shoulder to the faucet and his eyes flicked up at Hannibal, for a few seconds before landing on an object near the other man. "No need for me to stick around, plus you have a dinner party to prepare for tomorrow." Hannibal should have known that excuse would come back and bite him one way or another. Will tuned away and closed his toolbox, "besides you've probably had your fill of me for the rest of the night. Maybe even two." Once again Will let out a dry chuckle.

How wrong you are my dear boy, my hunger for you it seems is bottomless, I could never truly have my fill of you. The idea of me growing tired of you is as ridiculous as the idea of Chilton being able to offer anything beneficial to the psychiatric community in the near future.

“Nonsense Will,” Hannibal spoke, “I managed to get most if not all the preparations for tomorrow’s dinner done before the faucet broke, the rest can be achieved tomorrow.” He said as he walked away from the sink to stand in front of Will, a friendly attempt to block him from leaving. The act still felt caging to the profiler, even if it was dressed as something tamer. “Besides I have not yet repaid you for your actions.” Will studied the others face for a moment, as he tried to map out an exit plan.

“There’s no need to repay me for anything. I was more than happy to help you out of your predicament.” Will pointed out as he tried to disarm Hannibal’s attempt at repaying him. Offering Hannibal, a glimpse of his stubborn side, that attempted to come out of him in full view. The door it stood behind was held open just a crack, but was willing to be swung fully open if Will called for it.

“I insist, I could not get a good night’s rest knowing that I had the means to repay you and simply was not able to.” Hannibal countered, he could see Will’s peeking stubbornness with ease and knew the best way to subdue it was plain and simple guilt. Feeding Will’s guilty conscience was like feeding a starving dog, always accepting the offering without hesitation. It was painfully easy to have Will’s swaying mind sway into the directions of others favor when guilt was brought into the act. “Let me fix us something to have for dinner,” Hannibal offered, “that way one action can be repaid with another. You can think of it as balancing the acts out. That way I’ll be able to sleep with a clear conscience and your morals will still be intact.”

“I don’t know.” Will said with an edge of hesitation in his voice as he began to show signs of buckling, as his eyes began to flick around the kitchen. “It’s already turning a bit late and I don’t want to put you out.” Will countered, he knew the counterpoint was weak, but he still had some stubborn fight in him to offer.

“If it was any trouble to myself Will, then I wouldn’t have offered in the first place.” Hannibal said with a sly smile and a subtle tilt of his head. A posture that delicately screamed of how he had once again foiled Will’s attempt to bring some space between them. “Along the lines of time,” Hannibal abruptly spoke, catching Will off guard, by the sudden shift. As he watched Hannibal walk away from him and over to his fridge and begin to search through it. “It might not be what most are used to when they dine over at my house,” Hannibal stated as he closed his fridge. “But leftovers are known to be an excellent solution when it comes to preserving time.” Hannibal smiled as he set down a clear glass container on the island countertop.

“I never envisioned you as the leftover type.” Will admitted as he studied the semi clear speckled brown liquid; his guess some type of broth, that filled the container. Noting the bits of bright orange carrots mixed with other vegetables and some kind of meat, Will would believe it to be beef just by the texture alone.

“I’m usually not, but then again it is a truth one faces when they dine alone on most days.” Hannibal answered as opened the air tight lid to the container. The container let out a light hiss as the seal broke and Will could pick up a soft savory smell, that lightly teased his tastebuds. Almost enough to sway his thoughts of leaving for the night. Hannibal began to pull out the dishes he would need to properly reheat the leftover meal, purposely setting out

two bowls and two spoons. Not leaving Will any more room to turn down his offer. Why would he when Hannibal made it so blatantly obvious that he no longer had a choice.

“You are right about that,” Will asked as he watched as Hannibal poured the containments into a medium pan and flicked on the burner, it was obvious that he would be staying for dinner. He had put up a fight not to and lost, but then again it wasn’t that strong of a fight to begin with. Most of the time Will liked to say he could stand his ground just fine against other’s intentions towards him, there would be times when he did budge or bend for others. Only to preserve some of the grounds he cemented himself to, it was easier to seal cracks then it was to fill in chunks. With Hannibal it was the same thing, except Will found that he never had the chance to willing bend for the man. He was given illusions of chances, but that’s what all they were, illusions. Will found himself ignoring those illusions, so he could play pretend and keep his thoughts semi whole around the other. “What exactly are you about to serve anyway?” Will asked all but confirming his intent to stay for the meal.

“We’ll be dining on beef cheeks served in a bone marrow broth containing vanilla beans, port wine and balsamic vinegar,” Hannibal answered as he stirred his spoon, “Along with cooked carrots and yellow onions. By your curiosity of what I am making, it’s safe to say you are staying for diner.” Hannibal added as he looked over his shoulder towards Will, with a raised eyebrow.

“Let me finish cleaning up my mess and put my toolbox in the car.” Will answered with a hidden smirk. Confirming without actually confirming as he picked up his toolbox and headed towards the entryway.

“Smells delicious.” Will complemented as he took the pristine ceramic bowl, that Hannibal offered him. The heat from the stew seeped through the ceramic and greeted his hand with its soft presence. That Will knew would soon turn harsh if he kept holding on to the bowl for too long. Now that the stew was heated back to life, Will could catch more of the scents from the other ingredients that called the dish their home. Like the woody sweet smell of the cloves and the sharp tang from whatever form of tomato that was added. The smell no longer teased at Will’s tastebuds, but more like tortured them.

“Thank you,” Hannibal said as he served himself a portion, “let’s hope that your opinion does not change once you had the chance to tase it.” He smiled as he finished topping off his portion. “Shall we enjoy our meal in the dining room,” Hannibal said as he flicked off the stove and turned to head towards the other room, “do you mind grabbing the Malbec, while I grab the glasses?” He asked as he easily picked up the two thin stims of the wineglasses with one hand and continued towards the dining room. Without even waiting for Will to reply.

“Sure, no problem.” Will managed to say, as he watched Hannibal leave the room, not even waiting for a proper answer. Before he reached over and grabbed the bottle by its neck and followed Hannibal’s lead.

With the wine poured, the two sat down at the table across from each other. The soft lull of classical music drifted through the room, it made Will wonder when Hannibal had time to set up the music, since he had followed him out of the room rather closely.

He must have remote speakers like how Miranda has a remote fire place. Will thought to himself as he began to dine on the stew, making sure to gather as much of the ingredients in the spoon. Catching more of the warm savory spices that gathered in the stream as he raised the spoon to his lips, he blew lightly on the steaming stew, before ingesting the tastebud teasing meal for the first time. And was met with a bustle of bursting flavors, so strong he nearly melted on the spot. The sweet hard caramelization from the port wine meshing well with the slight smoky sweetness from the vanilla, all being broken up by the savory earthy spices. Then there was the beef cheeks, a cut a beef known for its tough texture, easily melted in his mouth thanks to the long hours of stewing in the broth.

“This is delicious.” Will completed after he swallowed and took a sip of his wine.

“I’m glad to know your verdict did not change.” Hannibal smiled softly as he took another bite of his own meal and mirrored Will’s action of sipping his wine after. Bathing in yet another rare complement that came from Will’s mouth. Letting it seep into his flesh and alight his mind, another memory to tuck away for later.

“I’m impressed, not a lot of people can make beef cheeks so tender,” Will began as he maneuvered his spoon around in the bowl, “and yet you managed to get it to where it melts like butter almost.” Will added as he ate another spoon full.

“What can I say,” Hannibal began as he look over the chunk of meat that sat nestled between a few carrots. Replaying the picture of frozen fear that painted one Robert Fenway’s face as he cornered him in his house, the sound that man’s body made as he tumbled down the hardwood stairs played well against the high shrill of the flute that sung its solo in the music he had set. Robert really should have learned to watch where he was going in such a hurry to get away. Then maybe he would have never ended up becoming a nourishing meal for Will, the very man Robert so rudely bumped into at the auction. But the deed was done and his flesh provided an excellent meal for the two to share, after a long day of work. “I know my way around several cuts of meat.” He smirked before placing the spoonful into his mouth.

“Tell me Will how’s the investigating going,” Hannibal said not looking up from his bowl, “are you still having trouble deciphering the emotions that are running through your killer’s mind. Or are you placing your attention somewhere else?” Hannibal asked flicking his eyes upwards at Will, who froze at the sudden inquiry. “Like the list of past lovers that seem to be almost bottomless to you.” Hannibal returned his gaze to the stew.

Will let out a heavy breath, as he fought the urge to set down his spoon, push his bowl away, and lean as far back from the table as he could. Much like he did the first time he and Lecter shared a meal together. Here he thought he could get away from shop talk and just have a normal meal. Well as close to a normal meal as one might have when it came to dinning with Lecter.

“I put both aspects on the back burner for now,” Will answered, still unsure what he should do with himself. “I decided to go over the interview from Moore’s last party.”

Hannibal let out a small hum of interest, still not looking up from his bowl. “And what pray tell, have you thought of when going over the interview?”

“That these men she goes after find themselves more inclined to her attention than one might think. She does or says something to draw these men to her side and manages to have them give all their attention to her.” Will answered as he began to reinitiate his eating. “What I gathered, Moore was known for his inability to keep himself grounded to one conversation or social gathering. Man had the attention span of a fruit fly. He often jumped around trying to find a something to stimulate himself, a druggie looking for the next hit.” He finished as he took another sip of wine, the deepness of the rich plum and blackberry coated his throat in a thick blanket. The soft heat from the tobacco prickled at his tongue.

“It sounds like this killer that you are after, might hold something to use against these men other than her appearance and body language, like you had speculated before.” Hannibal said as he set down his spoon and interlocked his fingers together and looking up at Will. “That she might hold some form of knowledge of what they might like to hear in a conversation. Indicating it might not be the first time they had met and that she is closer to these men than most might think.”

“My thoughts exactly.”

“This also could mean that this Black Window might be hiding amongst the list of past lovers.” Hannibal pointed out. Will set down his own spoon and let out a breath, running a hand over his mouth.

“It could mean that, but it also couldn’t,” Hannibal tilted his head. “You can get to know someone with out being in an intimate relationship with them.” He finished reaching over and slightly began to play with the utensil, obvious signs that his mind was beginning to wander down the twisted rabbit hole that was the current case.

“Do you have any thoughts on what the weapon is. I haven’t received a call from Jack like you promptly warned me about.” Hannibal spoke after a sip of wine, as he tried to gather Will’s thoughts and refocus the other into the participating in the conversation. Which worked as Will’s eyes flickered back to focus as they landed back on Hannibal.

“Not yet, but you can blame the lack of phone call from Beverly. She’s determined to figure out the weapon on her own.” Will said with a wavering smile, “But I’m a little fearful that she might be starting to enjoy the task at hand. So, if you want to intervein be my guest.” He added with sharp sort chuckle, which Hannibal replied with his own amused smile.

Like how lady luck was on Will’s side, father time was not on Hannibal’s and soon it was time for the two to part ways.

“I’d like to thank you again, for your help in replacing my faucet.” Hannibal said as he watched Will pull on his jacket. *And I’m pleased to know that my gift to you was found. Miranda should really look into a stronger security system, that and learn not to keep things that do not belong to her.*

“You’re starting to sound like a broken record,” Will softly chuckled as he finished adjusting his jacket, “but you’re welcome. I was more than happy to help a friend.” He said with a small smile, “I guess it’s my turn to thank you of for dinner.” He added.

“It was my pleasure. I just wished I was able to make you something fresher and not had to rely on my leftovers.” Hannibal said with a light sigh, away to show his displeasure to their sudden dinner together. “Next time I’ll be able to serve you a more proper meal.”

“Yeah, next time.” Will agreed, without much thought as he made sure he had everything on him. Going over the mental check list of, phone, wallet and keys. But suddenly the agreement entered his preoccupied mind the second he located his keys and his head shot up to look at a very pleased expression painting Hannibal’s face. “I should get going,” Will began to say as his mind began to scramble back together, he had never felt this flushed when Hannibal offered to have him over for dinner the countless times, they had known each other. So why did he suddenly feel that way at the moment? Could it be from the long work day followed by the repair he had done, spending more time with Lecter then he was used to, and then the thrown upon dinner. Was his social tolerance finally starting to run empty on him, causing the fumbling act to take place just as the night they shared started to come to a close. Will liked to believe that. “It’s an hour’s drive back home and I need to check in on my pack.” He finished, once again falling back on the excuse of his dogs to help bail him out of an awkward situation. That he found himself falling into an abundant amount of time lately.

“Understandable,” Hannibal said with a smile never leaving his face as he reached over to open the door for Will. Catching the scent of his own home and meal lingering on the younger man, taking the place that the cologne once held. “I only hope you get home safely and have pleasant rest of your night.” He added as he opened the door for Will.

“Thanks, and you too,” Will said as he walked through the door, his head held slight low to eliminate any chance of eye contact. Will was nearly down the steps, before he stopped and turned back up to Hannibal, “Oh, and enjoy your new faucet.” He added, fighting his own fidgeting facial expression.

“Thank you, I’m sure I will.” Hannibal said his smile deepening slight, Will just gave a short stiff nod in acknowledgement.

“Well, have a good night.” Will said raising his hand slight, before leaving fully.

“You too.” Hannibal said as he closed his door and watched as Will got into his car, through the slightly pulled back drapes.

One night, that’s all Will asked for. One night where his dreams did not hold a secret meaning or implied anything on his own bent moral code. Was that too much to ask for from the profiler, as he laid wrapped in his askew sheets and his imagination forced fed him images and scenarios that should not be given to him.

The forest floor dug harshly into the flesh of his bare knees. Will found himself in the dead forest, the air freezing, his skin prickled at the sharpness that traveled through the dark tress. The only heat he could feel was coming from the body he straddled, struggling to it hold still as the body tried to fight him off. Anger slowly erupting into his chest like a new born fire, struggling to come to life, as he struggled to hold the man still. Will could not make out the face, it was a blurry mess, like a view from a smudged glass. The face of whoever this man was, his brain would not grant him, which was odd, since that was something, his imagination like to torcher him with, explicit details. But Will could not focus on that, not

while this stranger began to thrash underneath him, kicking up the dirt floor and feeding the anger in his chest.

Will pressed hard on the other's shoulder, an attempt to hold him in place. The body's hand suddenly shot up and gripped his upper arm, redirecting the heat and Will's attention as he harshly looked over to where the body's large hand gripped him. Bringing in a realization to him, that his arm was bare, his eyes flickered away from the hand and to the rest of him. He was completely naked. Will pulled back harshly while realization slowly dripped into his mind like a melting icicle, and his arms stiffly moved to cover himself. One minute all he felt was the birth of anger, now it was being extinguished by the deathly cool of shame. That's when those hands came back to gently take a hold his arms, before they could fully cover himself and before he could scramble off of the fully clothed body. Will watched as those hands guided his arms downward, his eyes slightly wide in shock as his sense slowly came back to him. He was no longer in the mindset of the Black Window, but Will Graham and at the moment Will Graham was naked in the middle of an unknow forest, straddling an unknown figure that his mind would not grant him the identity with.

He watched as his arms were lowered away from himself, before his eye casted over to the body. In confusion to why the sudden shift from complete struggle for life, now to an almost calming manner. That's when his brain decided to play its cruelest joke on him yet. As he finally pulled his attention away from the hands and towards the once blurry face. To be met with the distinguish face of one Hannibal Lecter. Locking Will with unbreakable eye contact.

Will opened his mouth to say something, anything, to voice his own confusion. But before he could he felt his body begin to shift in his once solid stance as Hannibal slowly sat up. The urge to run and flee into the thickness of the woods was overwhelming. But not as overwhelming as the harsh enticing heat that ingulfed his arms where Hannibal's hands held him. Favoring the heat Will stayed in place as Hannibal grew closer, his heavy gaze unbreaking, as he fully sat up. Will now found himself sitting in his lap, feeling Hannibal's strong thighs refusing to give under Will's own weight. Will's bare chest pressing against Hannibal's and to him it felt like he was pressing against a brick furnace wall. As the heat that radiated off of the other found a new route to infect Will with and he let it infect him, bending to the licking tendrils that traveled over his exposed skin.

Without a word being spoken between the two, Hannibal began to place searing kisses against the cool column of Will's neck. As his hands left their hold on Will's arms and began to travel over the rest of his bare flesh, leaving traces of that harsh heat in their wake. If his voice wasn't taken from him, Will knew he'd be letting out the breathless moan that wished to be born and sung into the deathly quiet forest. Finding the strength to raise his arms, Will began to run his own hands; that itched to touch the man's body, over Hannibal's broad chest and shoulders. Working with the need to become closer to the other as he squirmed in the man's lap. He shut his eyes and leaned into the heavy kisses Hannibal was placing on his neck, letting the side of his face nuzzle against the older man. The intense heat consuming his once freezing body as Hannibal's kisses turned to light bites and heavy sucks. If this was real and not a dream then his handy work would leave marks, for the world to see.

God how he wished he could let out some kind of nose, to sing this pleasure that his imagination was gifting him that night. It was odd how the brain could supply the body with

a physical feeling that it never once delt with as he felt Hannibal confidently shift underneath him and grabbed one of his ass cheeks with a possessive grip. Giving that wild fiery heat a new unexpected way to possess his rising nerves. The heat enveloped his lower half, along with a formular, but at the same way strange sense of pressure that his body should not have known what it felt like in *that* area. It did not take Will's quizzical mind to understand what that heat and pressure was implying, making the fact that Will was left without a voice even more torturous.

This was all so much for his body and mind to bare. One moment he was trying to hold a struggling body down in the middle of the woods, with the soul purpose to end said body's life. Next, he was straddling Hannibal's lap, naked, and letting the man practically use his body. There were two racing parts of Will's mind fighting against each other. One half, knew how wrong this whole situation was. To have such a lust filled dream about a close friend was inappropriate to say the least. He should be trying to find away to wake himself up and put an end to this scenario that his imagination was supplying him. The other half on the other end, simply did not care about the discomfort that threaten to put out the fire that was near full blaze. To keep the scene going until like a blazing fire it finally burnt Will out, to leave him there basking in the imaginary pleasure he was gifted. Leaving him a withering writhing mess for as long as it saw fit. The confusing part was that Will found himself favoring that side of his thinking process. How he found himself quickly enjoying the building heat and the intense physical contact that was being given to him. The feel of Hannibal's teeth and lips on his neck, the way the man's hands traced every inch of his bare flesh with certainty, how his solid form pressed against his, and the invading heat now infect his whole body. It was strongly addicting and like any drug Will knew it was not healthy for him to grow dependent on.

Suddenly all that rising intense heat stopped and the air once again grew sharply cold. Will's eyes snapped open at the unexpected loss of heat, along with any movement that was shared between the two. He felt the heavy thumps of his heart as small spikes of fear began to tear into him. Will slowly leaned away from Hannibal's sudden stiff body, to see what had happened, to find out why the rapid rising frenzy of lust came to an end. To cast eyes on the blank expression covering the other's face. Will shifted fully, so he was facing Hannibal properly as he tried to figure out the puzzle of the lack of emotion he was shown from the other. With shaky hands Will reached over to hold Hannibal's face as his eye continued to search for any indication on what might be going on. Hannibal's hands left their place on Will's body in favor of trapping Will's hands with his. Holding them for a few seconds, before removing Will's hands from his face, gracing Will with a smile, before he began to tilt his head back. Revealing a long angry jagged line decorating his throat. Will watched with widen eyes as the line began to spirt out thick deep red liquid, painting Will's bare body. Covering him in its unforgiving wake of escaping Hannibal's throat, in favor staining Will's skin. To Will's own horror, he found himself not trying to desperately cover the wound, to stop the blood flow. But instead, he felt his eyes begin to shut blissfully as a smile began to form on his face, as he lightly leaned back and let the vital fluid that Hannibal was coating him with wash over his skin. Eliminating what ever chill that the night tried to trap him in.

Will woke up with a harsh shiver and a short deep lung stretching breath. One of the more peaceful ways his body reacted to when waking up from a dream. Of course, it had to happen right after such a mind warping experience. Will didn't bother to look at the clock, he found

himself not caring about the time. He could feel the soft warmth that the morning sun caressed his skin with and that's all he needed to know, that he had made it through the night. He stared up at his ceiling, heavily blinking away whatever remanence of sleep that still infected his eyes. Along with what might still be lingering in his thoughts about the dream he just escaped from. He really did not want to put anymore thoughts on what it all could mean, what symbolism could be lurking underneath the blatant act his brain put him through.

He let out another heavy breath; longer than the first one, as he rubbed the heels of his hands over his eyes. A disgruntle groan escaped his sleep dried lips as he desperately tried not to picture the sight of himself straddling Hannibal naked in the middle of the dead forest. The way the older man's hands felt on his cold infested skin, how good it felt to have that intense unforgiving heat fill his body and mind, or the way the man's blood started to paint his skin in such a rich shade of red. Will even found himself feeding the idea of trying to go back to sleep, so he could replace those images with something else, anything else.

Will shifted slightly in his bed, his body either trying to get comfortable or initiate the act of getting up to start the day. He could really use a cup of coffee and pair that cup with some much need quality time with his dogs. Anything to help pull his mind out of the winding mess it was trying to stay nestled in. That's when he felt *it*, the uncomfortable pleasurable stiffness, that was waiting to be noticed. Now that Will came some what to his senses, notice it he did as he lowered his hands and slowly pushed himself up. Just to confirm the mind invading feeling of unwillingly brought on pleasure was true.

"Fuck."

Chapter End Notes

I find the idea of Hannibal actually texting very amusing, I wish I knew why...

In Love and War

Chapter Summary

> It's Miranda's turn to deal her hand in the game and when she strikes she makes sure it's a damaging blow.

Will tried to bury the shame that infested his mind, that reached out to every possible thought that crossed its path and latched onto it with dripping tentacles and blade like fangs. Infecting whatever those thoughts might have been with its poison and making them twist and transformer into what the negative feeling wanted them to be. Never giving Will a moments peace, not since he had woken up that Saturday.

Part of him was somewhat grateful that it was a Saturday that his body decided to misbehave and not any other week day. He already felt the heavy stone of shame sink into his mind, he wouldn't be able to drag that stone to work with him. Where it would attack any thoughts he had about the case or about his lectures, leaving his mind nearly bare of any constructional thoughts except for its presence. At least at home he could attempt to busy himself with any house hold chore he could drag up to the surface, or the hobbies that graced his mind with small dosages of dopamine. As he attempted to make the once quick paced two days; that now traveled like cold thick molasses, keep up their normal speed. But no matter how hard he had pointed his mind into one direction, it always seemed like it wanted to face the other. To travel back to the scene that *he* had dreamt up, because even though sometimes Will felt like his imagination or his empathy were their own entity, he knew they were still apart of him. They were him. Which gave the shame that loitered in his mind another reason to stick around and stain whatever train of thoughts that traveled the tracks that were laid out.

It wasn't until Tuesday that the shame that stuck into his side like an infected thorn, decided to leave him. Will liked to believe it was because he had managed to bury that dream deep into the abyss of his thoughts. He then piled the case load over it just to make sure it would stay inside that said abyss and not try to climb out. What also helped was that he did not have to socially interact with anyone for the past three days. Giving him time to put all his energy into dealing with the negative emotion and not having to try and split that energy into acting social, even Miranda gave him the space he needed without him having to say anything to her. Complete silence from her throughout the three days and Will found himself not minding in the slightest. It seemed to help even, because the last thing he wanted to face was the feelings she brought out of him and have those feelings mix and muddle with whatever it was that the dream had conjured up in him.

"I believe that we should open our search when it comes to figuring out the identity of the Black Widow and what part she might have played in these men's lives." Will said as he leaned against the front of his desk, phone pressed close to his ear with Jack on the other end. Will knew he should have gone to Jack with the new theory to work with as soon as the idea

that the Black Window might not actually be a vengeful lover, but someone else that the victims might have interacted with came into mind. That they might be running in circles if they just focused on the list; that she might not even be a part of, and should put more resources into expanding the search by diving deeper into these men's history. But Will did not want to go to Jack unless he was sure that this new theory was up to par with what the man expected to hear from him.

"So, what you are saying is you want to drop the vengeful ex aspect and start from scratch?" Jack asked on the other end of the line and Will shifted on his feet.

"Yes and no," Will answered with a heavy sigh, "I believe that there is more than just that one aspect." Will began to walk around his desk and clicked on his laptop to pull up the case file, "After going over the interview sheet from Moore's party and some brain storming with Lecter. It could be a strong possibility that she might not have ever been an ex in the first place. She still could be, but maybe there is something else connecting these three men together other than what we originally thought." Will heard a chair squeak from the other end and he could picture Jack leaning back in his chair as he contemplated what Will had just told him.

"That is strong possibility," Jack answered and Will let out a mental sigh, somewhat relieved that Jack found satisfaction in this new line of thinking. "I'll have someone start looking into other parts of these men's backgrounds." Jack said and Will heard as the man shifted in his chair, "are you curtain that this might be somewhere the killer is lurking, Will?"

"What I've gathered," Will breathed out heavily as he rubbed the back of his neck, Jack always managed to make his muscles feel stiff. Even if he wasn't in the same room. "She knows more about these men than what they find attractive in a woman. She knows what to say to them and how to keep them engaged. She could have met them before under different circumstances than we originally thought." Will answered.

"Alright, but while that search is going on I still want you to keep going over the list," Will was starting to grow a sharp distain for the list. "Have you given anymore thoughts into the words that she is carving into the walls?" Will let out another sigh as he pulled up the three pictures of the walls and let his eyes travel over the harsh titles.

"They were words that she had delt with in her own life, she was most likely called these labels in her past and they dug themselves so deep into her that she could not shake them off. They are invisible scars that she carries." Will let out a heavy sigh as his train of thought reached the tracks limit. "But I haven't figured out why she decided to carve them into the wall, it could be because she is angry with herself and needs to let out that anger in a more physical way like I theorized before." Will answered as he recalled what Lecter had told him about hoofbeats and zebras, maybe just like the emotional aspect of the case he was also thinking too hard on the reasoning behind the damage. Letting that cloud his thinking to the point it might have him running blind.

"Well, that's a start, I'll let you get back to work." Jack said as he hung up the phone, releasing Will to continue on his task of pulling his mind apart all in the name of justice. Will clicked his phone off and slowly sat down in his chair, feeling far more exhausted than he should have been. He leaned his head back until it rested on the backrest of his desk chair and

just stared up at the tall ceiling of his classroom, contemplating if he was pointing Jack and the rest of the team in the right direction or not.

“Knock, knock.” Came a slightly playful voice, that helped guide Will slowly into a full sitting position and to his tired eyes delight, he was greeted by Miranda. Who was standing at the entrance to his classroom, holding a drink carrier in one hand and a white paper bag in the other.

“Miranda,” Will stood up to greet her as she walked into his classroom with a warm smile on her face, “what brings you down here?” He asked. Will would never get used to seeing Miranda in his office, she set off the balance of constant drowning weight that flowed through the room brought on by the topic of death. Her presence felt welcoming and open to him, it was proof of a world that did not orbit around the macabre, a world that he felt like he could only exist in. That it was just outside his reach and that Miranda might be the one to help him close the distance.

“Well, I have some time before my next consulting appointment,” Miranda spoke as she set down the bag and carrier on Will’s desk, “and since we haven’t really seen much of each other since last Wednesday, I thought it might be nice to surprise you.” She answered as she handed Will one of the two to-go cups.

“Thank you and I have,” Will looked down at his watch, “exactly an hour before my next lecture starts, I hope that’s enough time.” He said looking up at Miranda with a smile.

“Of course, that’s enough time.” Miranda smiled as she leaned over and placed a chaste reassuring kiss to his lips, before they both simultaneously took a drink of their coffee and Will was met with a familiar rich full body bitterness that nipped at his tastebuds in just the right way.

“I see you got me another American Jet.” Will chuckled as he took another light sip of the drink that demanded him to take his time and enjoy its dark caffeinated self. Miranda wrinkled her nose in a playful smirk and a scrunch of her shoulders as she also took another drink.

“That’s not the only thing I got you again, look in the bag.” She smiled as he eyes traveled over to the small white paper bag and Will set down his cup to open it. To be greeted by two light brown triangular shaped pastries nestled at the bottom.

“Apple cinnamon scones as well,” Will raised a quizzical eyebrow, “why do I feel like you might be trying to butter me up for something.” Will said as he looked up from the scones, not bothering to take them out as he searched over Miranda’s face. Looking for a sign of breakage that could tell him that his speculation was correct. Which by the slight twitch of her nose and the small shift of her eyes, he knew he was right.

“Alright you have me there,” Miranda breathed out, “I didn’t just want to surprise you with coffee and pastries, I also have something planned for us to do this week.” Miranda confessed as she set down her coffee and pulled opened her purse. “Now I know this is a big ask coming from me,”

“As big of an ask as the art auction?”

Miranda shot Will a scrunch playful look, before turning her attention back to her purse. “Not as big as the art auction. Where I plan to take you, we won’t have to deal with a stuffed over crowded room full of people, or that dreadful stiff social interaction, but we will have to dress for the occasion.” Now Will was curious as to what Miranda was planning for them this time, where it called for him to dress up and her trying to bribe him once more. His wonderment did not go in vain when he watched her pull out two cream-colored tickets and held them over for him to take. Will took the tickets, the paper felt crisp and thick in his hands and he noticed how the glossy gold of the elegant font shined just the right way under the light. Will’s eyes were captured by the word that held the most of the light, that shined in a larger font.

“Tosca by Giacomo Puccini,” Will read out loud, before lowering the tickets and looked over at Miranda, who held a beaming smile that buzzed with an over flow of excitement, so much so he could feel it reaching out and try to infect him. “These are opera tickets,” He said his face painted the perfect picture of confusion, as he tapped the tickets’ corner into his other palm, “you want to take me to the opera.”

“I thought you might enjoy it. The art of the performance, the rich music, and the emotions that it can bring to the surface when experiencing it in person.” Miranda said as she picked up her cup and took a drink.

“I never actually been to the opera,” Will said as he looked over the tickets, “so I can’t really say I’ve experienced all what you’ve just explained.”

Miranda let out a hum in response. “Really, I thought since you were friends with Doctor Lecter that he must have dragged you to a show or two.”

Will let out a soft chuckle and shook his head slightly. “No, he hasn’t, but I’m pretty sure if I gave him the chance, he would jump on it in a heartbeat.” Will squinted his eyes as he took in the smaller words that were engraved into the ticket. “Speaking of Lecter these tickets are for this Thursday at seven.” Will looked up at Miranda, with creased brows.

“Is that an issue, I would have gotten the tickets for Friday, but I have a business trip that I have to leave for that morning and the show will only be in town until then.” Miranda had a look of concern on her face as she stepped closer to look over the tickets that Will still held, even taking his hand and angling it for her to get a better view.

“I have this sort of standing appointment with Lecter on Thursdays at seven thirty.” Will’s voice just above a mumble as he tried to figure out the next course of action, his eyes flickering over the details on the tickets as if they might change if he looked at them a certain way.

“Can’t you just cancel your appointment with him?” Miranda asked as she turned her attention away from the tickets to look over at Will, “I mean there is nothing mandatory about these appointments, right?” Will lowered the tickets and began to think about actually canceling the session, but quickly pushed the idea away. He couldn’t do that, could he? They weren’t actually therapy sessions like most would paint it, they were just conversations that

the two shared. But then again who has conversations that mostly focused around one's mental health.

"No, they are not mandatory." Will answered, as he began to tap the tickets against his palm again, his eyebrows knitted together as he tried to lean as far from the idea of canceling as possible. But then flashes of the dream strobed into his mind. The way he had dreamt of how Lecter's lips felt on his neck, how his strong hands held tight to his flesh, the way the searing heat traveled over him, and *in* him as well. It was as if he had never woken up in the first place and he was still in those deep woods, straddling those strong thighs. God could he actually be able to sit in front of that man after what his mind managed to conjure up Friday night, or with the knowledge of how he had *handled* the aftermath of said dream. The answer was a very strong no. The shame he thought he had managed to meticulously bury and leave for dead had begun to claw its way to the surface. He could feel it begin to twist in his gut like the point of a dull knife. Maybe he could skip just one session, for his own sanity, which was a laugh. Avoiding a psychiatrist to preserve one's own sanity.

"What are you thinking Will?" Miranda's voice soft that same softness matched her eyes. As she placed a delicate hand on his arm, drawing him out of the winding mess that his mind clawed its way back to. "Because if you don't want to go, I completely understand. I know that I sprang these tickets on you. I honestly thought it could make up for not being able to see each other Friday and also not being able to see each other this up and coming Friday, along with the near week I'll be gone."

"I'll go."

"Pardon?"

"I'll go to the opera with you. I'll call up Lecter and cancel this week's session with him." Will clarified as he turned to face Miranda, who took in a short breath through her nose and had a look of surprise mixed with joy. "But on one condition. When you get back from your business trip, I plan what we do for our next date together." He offered. Will wasn't blind, he had noticed the number of times that Miranda organized their dates and how they outweighed the number of times he had. It was a form of control she was trying to gain over him, which prickled lightly under his skin the more times he thought about it. Married with how he had been stepping further and further out of his comfort zone for Maranda and yet he could tell she had not done as much as he had. Will wanted to change that, just like he wanted to change Miranda's habit of spending large amount of money on him. Show that he too could give into this relationship like she had been doing all this time. To rebalance where they stood with one another and try to take as much of the control as she had.

"Of course, sweetheart, as soon as I get back, we can do whatever you want." Miranda smiled as she leaned over and placed a soft kiss to Will's lips. "What exactly do you have in mind?"

"Have you ever been fishing?"

Will took a deep breath before he hit the dial icon, the anxiety and lingering shame that mixed in his stomach and boiled to irritation had the profiler dreading the interaction with the voice on the other end. He wanted to just abandon the plan to call and push it off for another day, but Will knew he could not procrastinate the act. He already waited through his

last lecture of the day to do so. Now he had to just suck it up and get it over with as soon as possible, that way it wouldn't be hanging over his head like a sword. Waiting for the rope to snap and come plummeting down, ready to impale him.

"Hello Will," Came Lecter's rich even toned voice, "and what do I owe the pleasure for this unexpected call?"

Will took a deep breath, while he worked to push out the reason for the call, that hooked into the sides of his throat like rusty fishhooks. "Hello Lecter, the reason for the call is it regards about Thursday's appointment." Will knew that Hannibal had insisted that he addressed him by his first name. To drop the formalities between them, but this felt like a moment that called for formalities. It helped bring up a slight barrier that Will was in need of standing behind during the phone call.

"Oh, has something came up?" Lecter asked and the way the other man's voice sounded, with a small drop of concern in those words, had Will rethinking about what he was just about to do.

"You can say that," Will breathed out as he wrapped his free arm around his midsection, away to ease his mind and give him some balance. "I'm not going to able to make it."

"And why is that?"

"Miranda is taking me to the opera this Thursday night and it runs into our session time." There was a thick pause on the other end, the only thing Will could hear was his own heavy heartbeat. He found himself straining to pick up any sound coming from the other end of the call. Something that could indicate what might be going through the doctor's mind, or what his body language might be. But that was an ability that Lecter had, to go completely still and blank, the perfect rendition of a statue. Giving no insight on what might be going through his mind unless he granted the person who was looking access. And at the moment Will wished that Lecter could grant him that privilege, anything to help ease the whirl wind of thoughts that wanted to take off through his already storm ridden mind.

"I did not know you partook in the opera scene." Lecter stated his voice still even as ever and Will felt his own hand tighten on his side. Wrinkling the smooth fabric of his shirt and digging into the flesh that grew taunt underneath. Lecter sounded calm while Will felt like a hurricane was bound to run through him at any moment.

"I'm not actually, this will be my first time going." Will confessed as he felt his chest decompress with a well let out breath, that had been building ever since he had pressed the dial icon.

"What show are you two going to watch?"

Will reached over to his satchel and pulled out the ticket Miranda left for him. "Oh, we are going to go see, Tosca by Giacomo Puccini." He answered as turned the ticket over in his hand, before sliding it back into place.

“That’s interesting. A tale of passion and jealousy, all preserved in a dark tragedy. I was quite moved by the show when I viewed it for the first time.” Lecter said. “And this will be the first show you have ever seen am I correct?”

Will let out a short chuckle, suddenly the two harsh emotions that were boiling in his stomach and having his heart running like a scared rabbit that had a predator on its heels. Were near nonexistence and Will could feel himself begin to relax. “Yeah, you got that correct, the closes I’ve ever came to the opera was the phantom kind. Before it was turned into a musical that is.”

“Book or movie?” Such a simple question had a smile begin to play at Will’s lips and he could feel the spark of a subject matter that he enjoyed begin to be introduced into their discussion, if Will wasn’t carful, he ran the risk of going on a long elaborate tangent. Not stopping until either his throat went horse or Lecter intervened.

“I read the book when I was in junior high, found it at a hand me down book store. Still have it actually, it’s sitting somewhere on my bookshelf.” Will answered and he heard a small hum on the other end of the line. Which fed that spark and helped encourage him to continue. “Then I watched the nineteen sixty-two movie a year later when the town’s only movie theater was playing it for some promotional reason that I can’t recall.”

“Have you ever watched the silent film?” Lecter asked.

“No, but I’d love too. I just haven’t found myself in the right mindset to enjoy it and it’s hard to find a site that offers to stream it. I really should just try to find a copy on DVD.” Will answered as he began to mindlessly fiddle with one of the few paper weights that sat on his desk. Trying to distract his mind, so it wouldn’t latch too hard on the current subject and end up talking the whole time Lecter was on the call with him.

“Maybe you should,” Lecter responded, “but I do hope you and Miranda enjoy the performance Thursday.”

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome and I also hope you don’t plan to cancel next week’s session on me.” There was a subtle flat humor note in the tone of the last part of the sentence and it helped Will picture that slight almost invisible smile Lecter sometimes let grace his face.

“Of course not.” Will replied as he felt his own slight invisible smile start to form.

“Good.”

After they said their goodbyes, Hannibal felt the oozing dripping tar like emotion become hard, before it began to twist inside of his chest. Until it became taut and could no longer contort freely with itself. But that did not mean anything, because he could still feel it try to turn inside him. Disobeying the tightness that fought against the motion, until the feeling just snapped. Exploding in harden shards, like shrapnel spreading the once well contained jealousy into every crevice of his being. He could feel the agonizing heat hit the walls of his

core and start to spread over him like gasoline. Burning with a ragging anger that left no nerve of his untouched with its dripping kerosene.

If Hannibal was a weaker, leaser, more pathetic man, he would let that bright anger show. Let it rise to the surface like it begged him to do and grant it the access to be on full display. Even though he was alone in his office and he did not have to put on his more regal persona. Hannibal would not let that happen, that would be admitting that Miranda had successfully crawled under his skin. No, instead he would let the feeling scratch and thrash inside him like a rabid wild beast, before he succumbed to the full body effect that the lowly feeling thrusted upon him. Hannibal took a deep breath and let the anger wash over him in its stiff waves as he grounded himself. Setting his phone down on his desk; just on the wrong side of too hard, as he gathered his thoughts. He really should have seen this coming, thinking back to the conversation he had shared with Miranda, the woman was basically singing about her next step. In her siren like melody that hid its true intention to those that were cursed to listen to it.

So, that was your move Rhettford. I took Will's time from you so you thought it fit to do the same to me. An eye for an eye one might like to say. But unlike myself, you decided to strike a more damaging blow. I guess I wasn't the only one to do some investigating on my opponent, you found a weakness and like any disguised predator you took your chance to strike. But unlike your usual pathetic prey you pray upon, I tend to strike back twice as hard.

Hannibal tapped one of his pens on his desk as he began to plan out his next form of attack to play in the game. Something that could leave just as much of an impact as Miranda had made to him. She had stolen yet another moment from him to give to Will, taken something he only dreamt of bestowing onto the other, to share with him. Now gone thanks to his already thought-out plan for the profiler and thanks to Miranda, who had no right to interfere in the first place. Leaving Hannibal to dig deeper into what he might seek out to do next.

It was going to be somewhat of a difficult task to achieve, he still had little to go off of what Miranda held dear to her. She had sold a character to the public, that he knew after interacting with her was certain. To go off of anything that she let the public see about herself could be a risky move, it could back fire if he put all his effort into an aspect that was untrue. The humility that could follow from the possible flaw would be far worse than the jealousy that he felt whenever Miranda was in the picture. He knew this ment he had to do more of his own form of investigating on her. That did not involve the aid from the internet and more the aid from the real world. A part of him wished he had pushed the subject of Will's opera date a little further than just asking for the show he would be viewing. But he did not want to come off as strongly interested in the little venture the two were having. He already showed far too much interest in their relationship as a whole and to keep pushing for more information would risk how open Will felt about giving up that side of his life to the doctor. Hannibal had to rely on sly behavior and altered emotions to get the other to become that open to the subject of discussion in the first place. To alter that behavior any further could lead to a negative outcome, raise Will's suspicion that lay dormant to the ploy Hannibal had set up. Which made it difficult to gather details that could assist Hannibal in the hidden game that unknowingly circled around the profiler.

Hannibal sat across the street the next day as he watched Will and Miranda occupy a small table outside a just as small café. He had speculated that the two would be sharing lunch

together, their opera date was the next evening giving the couple a small window to plan. Having memorized Will's schedule and paired with the weight of the case, Hannibal knew that there was going to be little to no free time that the profiler would be able to give for the woman. Resulting in the couple to jump on any opening that passed their way, and by how Miranda had mentioned rearranging her schedule something told Hannibal she was facing the same obstacle.

The two were far too busy absorbing one another's presence to even consider the world around them. Giving Hannibal the perfect opportunity to sit on the metal bench and watch them unnoticed, just like those who passed by their table. He watched as they shared conversation and he was a little taken back as to how at ease Will seemed to be acting with her, the full range of emotion that played on his face was a stark contrast to what he let others see of him. Hannibal was used to seeing only a few of Will's emotions that always cycled through the same three, melancholy, serious, and stubborn. Now and then, Will would show more of his lighter side, the emotion that allowed the small snippets of a playful behavior that was reserved for a selected few. The side that Hannibal found himself being granted to see little by little with each interaction they had. The same side Will was putting on display for Miranda as the two dinned together, that had Hannibal forcing himself to fight against the new form of jealousy that poisoned his veins as he watched said display in action. The bright tooth showing smile that could infect any room with its simple presence and the excited hand movements, an indication that the topic that they shared weighed heavily in favor of whatever interest Will held. All that should be his.

Their little lunch couldn't have ended soon enough, he knew Will only had an hour and half to spend with her and the little drive over to the café had costed him around twenty minutes of said time. Most would call how easily Hannibal was able to follow Will's Volvo unsettling, Hannibal just stroked his own ego with the talent. Those same skills would come in greatly when the couple began to part ways for the day, not reconnecting until Thursday night. He watched as Will and Miranda said their parting goodbyes, stiffly putting up with the sight of how they exchanged a light hug and a lingering kiss. That had the psychopath mentally rolling his eyes. Before Will walked off in one direction and Miranda in the other, giving Hannibal a reason to get up for the first time. As he followed Miranda at an even well thought out pace, while she walked down the semi crowded sidewalk, with a complete blank look on her face. The bubbling emotion she had put on display while with Will was nowhere to be seen, no form of emotions from the date lingered on her face. It was like it never even happened in the first place. People often held a look of contentment when they parted ways with their partner, an unknown smile would linger on their person, or a look of enjoyment. Not noticeable to the person until it was pointed out by an outsider. Not Miranda, no as soon as Will had left her gravitational pull that look was gone, as if someone had flipped a switch and shut off all her facial muscles.

But Hannibal could not put too much focus on the sudden switch, he had to focus on where Miranda was heading. She walked with a purpose; a trait Alana was all too eager to point out to him just a month back. In reality all Miranda did was walk to where she had parked her car, Hannibal had noticed the vehicle the night he surveilled her house. Parked in the winding driveway just like the rest of the home owners, even though her house was not as eye catching as the rest of that occupied the neighborhood, she still fell into the duplication effect that the whole neighborhood tried to fight. Hannibal seen the Rolls Royce when he had drove

past the café Will had parked a few spaces in front of. While he searched for a place to park his Bentley, he had driven passed the already parked luxury car, indicating that Miranda must have shown up before Will and chose to wait for the other to arrive first before approaching. Which had Hannibal pondering, how many times she must have done that during Will's and hers dates. Making the younger man believe he had shown up first, presenting his punctual side for her.

While Miranda got inside her car Hannibal had walked a few cars length and then crossed the street to his. Hannibal knew Miranda would not be going back to her office that day. He had called earlier, to see if he could get any information on what her newly formed schedule might be. He had disguised his intention; along with his voice, abandoning his accent and raising the pitch only slightly, as he played the part of a misinformed assistant from an up in coming fashion blog looking for an interview with the well-made business woman. The light fragile voice on the other end of the line had fallen so easily for his ploy, it was honestly pathetic. He recalled the conversation as he followed loosely behind the Roll's Royce. Only a dingy off grey minivan and a rusty two door pick-up separated his car with Miranda's.

Brittney; that was the young assistance name if he recalled correctly, had easily given him all the information he wanted. Revealing that Miranda would not be able to partake in any online or in person interviews, because of her suddenly rearranged schedule which had caused a short display of havoc; the fact that Hannibal had caused such a subtle disturbance had the jealousy simmer down to a tolerable state that he could manage. The young woman also mentioned how Miranda would not be available until she returned from a business trip that she was leaving for Friday and she would not be available until the following Thursday. With a subtle push of good nature curiosity, it was reviled that Miranda would be leaving the state in favor for traveling across the country to sunny California. Leaving Will open and without Miranda circling around him like a pesky fly for nearly a whole week. It would definitely put a small strain on their relationship, to deal with such a large distance between them, for the first time was always difficult for any relationship. It would be easy for Hannibal to plant a small seed of uncertainty in the profiler's mind, when they would inevitably interact with one another. Hannibal knew he couldn't wait until their normal Thursday appointment to plant the seed, there would not be enough time for the seed to take root. He'll no doubt have to find away for them to come together during their week without Miranda hanging over them. Perhaps Will could use an extra session that week since he missed his first one, or the new faucet he oh so lovingly installed might be acting up and Hannibal could use the other's help in solving the issue. All perfect possibilities to be played out, which one should he choose to indulge in?

Another thought accord, while Miranda was away in another state for six days, it would leave her house unoccupied. Giving him free range to explore her domain. Much like he wished he could have that Friday he had followed the two, where he witnessed the tasteless show they performed on the couch. As he discovered it was easy to break into the house through the back doors. While Miranda rested in her no doubt lavish bed, unaware of the beast that roamed through the darkness of her house. At the time Hannibal could not indulge himself with a thorough look through, he had a simple task in mind. But now he held the knowledge of Miranda being absent for nearly a week, giving him all the time, he needed, even more some, to trail through the area she called home. To see what form of skeletons she might be concealing from the world.

Sadly, following Miranda proved to leave little to no reward. The woman was utterly boring, to put anymore effort into the task would be a waste. He had tailed the woman throughout the city. She only ever stopped twice and that was at another café to fill that bothersome caffeine addiction a lot of people seemed to share. Followed by a stop at a men's retail store Hannibal never had heard of, he followed in behind her after a few long beats of a second. The store was nice, it attempted to pull off a more high-end look. With its dark wood flooring and sleek cream-colored walls. With faux leather benches and well-kept mirrors, but the large amount of circular clothes racks that cluttered the floor, the lights that flickered with no rhythm, and lack of a well trained staff, had given it a simple nice atmosphere. Hannibal watched as Miranda approached a worker; by the way the stranger held themselves and dressed, told him that this was the manager. The two exchanged greetings before they disappeared to the back rooms, probably to check on the sale of her brand, that Hannibal had noticed hanging off one of the many racks, or if the owner needed more stock. Worse she was looking for another gift to bestow upon Will. After a long moment Miranda emerged from the back room, shook the manager's hand and parted. Hannibal continued his task as the woman just roamed the sidewalk and gazed into the small window fronts, acting just like everyone else who littered the sidewalk and unknowingly helped him blend in.

The boring task was cut short, when Miranda stopped suddenly in her tracks and for a split gnawing second Hannibal believed that she would turn around and spot him amongst the clutter of sidewalk dwellers. But she did not, instead he watched as her confident stance turned sour as her shoulders turned rigged and her fist clenched. Before she reached into her purse with directed anger and ripped out her phone. Hannibal had recalled a small detail Will mentioned off hand during their time together Friday, while his mind was in the mist of not being too occupied with the faucet, but too occupied not to put up barriers around the topic. Will spoke about how Miranda had to deal with her own thorn in her side that came in the form of one Brittney, how the fragile woman often called or interrupted Miranda at the worst time.

Hannibal had the honor to watch first hand as Miranda answered her phone, part of him wanted to step closer, that way he could catch the one-sided conversation. So, he could soak in the frustration that leaked off the woman, to be given something other than the coy attitude she wore around him. But he could not risk being spotted; he knew Miranda made sure to take in all of her surroundings, taking note of every person who crossed her path. So, he was cursed to stand at what he believed to be a distance that would cloak him from her keen awareness and watch. Miranda angerly shut her phone screen off and stuffed it back into her purse, before turning that cool purposeful walk into a frustrated strut as she made it back to her vehicle. Indivertibly ending their time together.

Seven thirty Thursday night, a time normally held with Will's presence in Hannibal's office. A time Hannibal had carved out for the two to fill and conjoin their thoughts with whatever element that might be plaguing the profiler. A time Hannibal had not realized he often looked forward to until it was ripped away from him, as the saying went. You never know what you possess until it is gone. And gone it was, the carved-out slot of time passed through Hannibal's office like a cold ice filled breeze. It reminded the man of how empty his office could feel when it was just himself occupying the space and what bothered him was it never felt that way before, not until he had opened his door for one Will Graham. Who managed to fill the space like a miss placed puzzle piece that fell out of the box and was theorized to be

either lost to time or simply never packed in the first place. Even though it was obvious that was the last thing Will wanted. He often tried to make his presence while in the office as minimal as possible. By either sticking to one small spot, or always moving around, creating a distance between the two. A distance Hannibal sought out to shorten anyway he could.

There was no real reason for the man to linger in his office, since it was clear the Will would not be joining him for the night. He had chosen his path to take, favoring Miranda's gift of an experience he never had, over the same routine he had grown accustom too. When the younger man had told him the reason for the cancelation it caused the blood that ran smoothly through his veins to freeze. Only to boil back to life with the heated anger that surrounded the reasoning. It took a nearly nonexistence amount of self-control not to lash out at the profiler with well-placed words and even controlled tone. Instead, he bit the tip of his silver tongue and chose his own path for the conversation, dipping more into a newly discovered interest Will had reviled to him. Perhaps he could use that knowledge in his favor in the near future.

An unforeseen ring, caught the man off guard, he looked down at his wrist watch with a quirked eyebrow. Wondering who might find it ethical to be calling him at such a late hour, he ran through a list of possible suspects, but none came to mind of filling in the outcome. Deciding to not linger on the who's, Hannibal simply picked up his phone to see if the caller id might give any indication. He was somewhat intrigued to see the number listed as unknown, but that intrigued turned bitter when it ment he had to deal with a complete stranger on the other end and he was in no mood to put on a façade for someone not worth his time. It seemed he might have to dip into his more callous attitude, he reserved for those who were truly beneath him.

"Hello and who may I be speaking to?" He simply stated not even willing to give up his name for this faceless caller.

"Good evening, Doctor Lecter." Purred out a voice, that would have a man's skin tingle and heart palpitating, but instead it had Hannibal clenching his jaw and blood boiling.

"Miss Rhettford, what an unforeseen surprise," Hannibal swallowed the rising heat of anger that licked at the inside of his throat like stomach acid. "How did you get a hold of my personal number?" Hannibal heard a teasing hum on the other end.

"I guess you are not the only one Will let's use his phone," Miranda replied with coy, "all I had to do was look through his recent call log and there was your number sitting pretty right on top."

"I see," Hannibal responded as he reached over to the scalpel that sat next to a freshly sharpened pencil. "And what is the reason for the sudden call?"

"I thought you might like to know that Will really enjoyed watching Tosca," Miranda spoke with a soft edge in her. "You should have seen him tonight," Miranda let out a delicate reminiscing breath, "the way the performance easily captured his attention and held it in such a loving hold. I've never seen him look so opened to the world while also looking so captivated, he even shed a few tears near the end that's how moved he was with his first experience. It's no surprise such a moving piece could do that to him, I mean you and I both

know how exceptional his mind is. With that pure empathy of his, how it easily has him picking up others' emotions and absorbing them as if they were his own. A sight I will always treasure, seeing him left raw thanks to the heavy emotions that washed over him."

Hannibal felt the sharp tip of the scalpel threaten to cut into his thumb. A warning to what might happen if he let Miranda achieve what she sought out to do to him. "Did you just call me late at night to gloat Miss Rhettford? I must say I am very disappointed in such a childish behavior, here I thought you were above that." He set down the scalpel and let it slightly roll away from his grasp, while the image of what Miranda's blood might look like dripping from it's sharp point help cool the growing anger that rippled throughout his chest.

Miranda let out an edged chuckle, "That's very kind of you to think so highly of me," Hannibal grew annoyed at the way Miranda had misinterpreted the insult and twisted it to feed her own ego. "But no, I did not call you just to brag, I called to discuss something I had noticed just the other day."

"If you are looking for psychiatric help, I must inform you I am not looking to take on any new patients."

Miranda let out a more rounded laugh, "Oh, that's very funny Doctor Lecter, who knew such a pristine man like yourself had sense a humor. But in all seriousness, I wanted to point out that Wednesday afternoon I noticed the most peculiar sight. You see while I was out, I kept noticing a Bentley, that kept popping up now and then." Hannibal did not say a word, here he thought he had hidden so well under Miranda's radar. He was once again proven wrong by Miranda's ability with observing her surroundings. "I mean it was so jarring to see this black Bentley following me throughout the city the other day, I even had to put my normal activities on hold so I wouldn't be caught doing something that could give the person observing me anything to work with."

"How well thought out." Hannibal said through clenched teeth. As the beast inside he roared in anger and gnashed its thick fangs, fighting to be let out and bath the richness of Miranda's blood. All what Miranda had described to him on the other end, about Will's first time witnessing the beauty of opera. Still held taunt in his mind, even though the subject matter had changed and he was now being ridiculed for what he had done Wednesday. But his mind could not leave the other subject alone long enough to redirect his focus. How he would no longer be able to witness the first drop of richness of the performance grace the other's face and what might stir in the man's emotion as he traveled with the music. All that was ripped away from him and he would never be able to face it. All he had was what Miranda described to him and it did not do what a beautiful sight it must have been any justice.

"My thoughts exactly," Miranda hummed as if she hadn't just provoked the animal on the other end of the phone call. "That wasn't the only odd thing that happened that day, because I also received a phone call from my assistant about an up in coming fashion blog looking for an interview. But when I looked for said blog it seems to not even exist in the first place. How peculiar don't you think Doctor Lecter, first the Bentley than a caller looking to gain information about my schedule." The pitch of Miranda's voice and the false astonishment tone scrapped at Hannibal's eardrums like rusty nails.

“Yes, it is very peculiar. Perhaps you should be more careful Miss Rhettford, with your social presence and the world we inhabit it is very common for someone like you to gain the attention of the more dangerous kind of being.” The growl Hannibal had to hold down rumbled in his throat.

“That’s very sound advice Doctor Lecter, good thing my *boyfriend* works with the FBI,” Miranda said, “speaking of boyfriend, I wonder how Will might feel about last Friday night.”

“What does last Friday night have to do with our current conversation?” Hannibal questioned as he tried to predict where Miranda was leading him.

“Well, while I looked though Will’s call log, I happened to notice that my call did not appear on the list. Now I know I said it was best if we kept what we discussed the other night to ourselves, but after Wednesday I think it might be best to bring it up. Of course, I wouldn’t bring it up right away, I’ll make up some offhand comment about how I once left a message with my assistant to give to someone and bring up how they received it, before wondering if he ever received the one, I left Friday night. He’ll end up wondering what I mean and I will have to explain that I called last Friday night where you picked up the phone and assured me that you would deliver the message, I had to give you. Before anyone can say anything else, he’ll want to know why you didn’t relay my message to him and deleted any trace of the call from his phone.” It was clear that Miranda was waiting for a response from him, but he would not give her one. His mind was preoccupied with trying to find away around the threat of such a large attack. Would Miranda go through with the idea she toyed with in front of him, teasing him with such a move that could destroy the delicate trust that Will was slowly gifting him each day, trust that was Hannibal’s to break when he felt like it was time to do so. Once again something that was ment to be his and his alone was being threatened to be ripped away from him.

“Of course, I might not actually do that. After all it’s just a tactic to play, a very *big* tactic if I might add. Who knows how Will might react to the sudden thought of a man he is starting to consider a good friend to do such a deceitful act. It might cause an end to the friendship and what ever relationship that you wished that the two of you might have. Leaving him in such a new form a rawness and venerability, easy for anyone to come by and pick up the pieces that lay scattered on the ground.”

“Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that shall we, keep things dignified between the two of us. Like you mentioned before, why must we bring Will in the middle of our quarrel.” Hannibal offered and the offering tasted bitter and degrading on his tongue. As soon as the first word her spoke slipped passed his lips he fought the urge to vomit.

“An ideal thought Doctor Lecter,” Miranda said, obviously pleased with the offering, “well it’s getting late I have trip to pack for.”

“Then we should end the conversation here.”

“I agree, goodnight, Doctor Lecter.” Miranda purred, before she hung up without hearing Hannibal’s reply. Leaving the man to sit alone in the quiet of his office, while waves of anger and frustration washed over him. It made his muscle tense and his chest tight as he redirected the strong damaging emotions that could cause him to misstep in the game. But as he felt

himself slipping into uncertainty on what he might do, feeling himself fall victim to the obvious advantage Miranda held over his head. How she could easily turn around and use it against him at any moment she saw fit, trapping Hannibal on the spot with little to no room to work with. Or so she thought.

Because now that the anger in him finally cooled down and he no longer had to put up with Miranda on the other end of the line, it finally filtered into his clear mind. An idea began to hatch and all he had to do was coax it out of the hardshell it fought to escape from. Where then it would enter the world and spread its newly formed dark wings and take on the form of something just as damaging. No, it would be more damaging, something that could rain havoc over those foolish enough to be caught underneath it's flight.

You poor foolish woman, Hannibal thought as he bathed in the masterful idea that he was given. *Do you not know what happens when you try to put a wild predator on a short chain? It is inevitable that they will lash out and strike at their captor. Leaving such a devastating wound that could have been avoided if you just left it be in the first place. You thought I played dirty before Rhettford when it came to my faucet, just watch what happens when you force my hand.* Hannibal felt the edge of his mouth turn upward as he began to plan out his next step. *If you wanted to bring Will into this then so be it.*

To Force a Steady Hand

Chapter Summary

Will just wanted one normal morning to himself before work started, to bad Hannibal had another idea.

Chapter Notes

Once again I am here to thank you all for the lovely comments. I enjoy every single one of them and I am glad you guys still enjoy the story.
Hope you all enjoy this new chapter :)

The steam from the coffee twirled in the wet autumn air that settled around the farm house like a weighted blanket. Will watched with sleep pressed eyes as four of his seven dogs lazily roamed the backyard of his house. Daring to step into the crowded woods, but hanging back waiting for his permission to continue, the smallest being the bravest to test the obvious boundary he had set up long ago. The dog would look over their shoulder to see if they were being watched and Will would lean against the porch railing with pointed look, acknowledging the action and the dog would turn away from the tree line wagging its tail as if nothing happened. He would then take a sip of his coffee, feeling the hot liquid travel through his system offering its heat to any cold point in his body that his robe and flannel pajama pants did not cover. Will looked over to the rest of his pack who laid on the other end of the porch, soaking in the soft warmth that traveled down from the strong morning sun. They laid close enough together so they could pick up on the others presence, but far enough so they did not have to battle over the enveloping heat that was gifted to them. Once in a while a sharp cool breeze would unwelcoming travel through the porch, making Will glad he chose to drape his body in the house robe and have him fiddle with the idea of leaving his dogs unsupervised so he could go back inside the house. But he stayed outside taking in the lung opening air and the peaceful surroundings that he was thankful he was able to call home.

If he closed his eyes, he could still feel the music from last night travel though out his body. The reverberation from the live orchestra that had his nerves alighting with each deep pitch that was sung out to him. He could still hear the faint remnants of the performers voice buried deep in the back of his mind that paired with the pulsing emotions that tried to come back to life. The whole experience had left him emotionally drained on a new level he never thought was possible. He was used to feeling a certain drain from a long day of standing in front of students' eyes, where he wasn't completely empty when he returned home. Then there was the drain that came from profiling and acting like Jack's seeing eye dog, that drain was harder

to recover from. Leaving him to feel near hollow for days as if he was a walking husk that could be taken away with a simple breeze, that often could only go away from time spent with his dogs or reinforced isolation from the thundering outside world, sometimes with the help from Lecter. The drain he had felt after the opera was something in a new form, unlike the two others, Will found himself not disliking the feeing. The drain actually felt rejuvenating like what left his body was all the toxins that built up over the busy weeks and were finally being washed away from him. It reminded him of the after effect of being injected with a low dosage of an anesthetic, he felt his body was swimming through the last end of the night he shared with Miranda. When he had woken up the next morning, he actually felt refreshed, a rare occurrence and it was welcomed. Will took a deep breath, catching the warm full body scent from the still freshly poured coffee mixed well with the crisp aroma of the falling leaves. Hammering the peaceful feeling that wrapped around him like how the morning sun coated his dogs, in a warm welcoming embrace he often forgot that he sometimes needed to feel.

The dogs picked up the sound of tires rolling over gravel before he did, each one raising their heads towards where the sound originated from. Some would tilt their heads while others let their ears twitch, as they worked to pinpoint the sound and figure out who or what might be making it. Will let out a light huff, as he felt that peaceful feeling that was lovingly gifted to him being taken away. He knew there was no use fighting for the feeling to stay with him, letting it slip off of him as he straightened his stance and began to walk back inside. He couldn't fight for the feeling to stay, but he could prolong its departure. The four dogs that roamed around the yard took his movements as a signal for their own and they began their journey around the house, while the three that had joined him on the porch got up and sluggishly followed him inside. Will rubbed his free hand over his eyes, trying to wipe away the bits of sleep that still remained present as he trudged through his house, avoiding bumping into his coffee table and the two dogs, who did not mind walking into his pathway. Giving him that much of an excuse to keep his movements as slow as possible while he raised his barriers and prepared himself for whoever decided to grace him with their presence. Here he had chosen a place to live that was off the beaten path, a blink and you'll miss it location and yet for some misplaced reason more and more people seemed to want to disturb his blatant form of isolation.

"I'll be there in a second." Will called out when the person began to knock on his door, obvious to them he was not walking fast enough to greet them. Whoever they might be, they were no stranger, his dogs did not alert him with their barking, so he did not feel the need to raise his guard as he walked over to his front door. It also helped him go through his list of people who knew where he lived and who his dogs saw as a welcomed guest. It was a small list, but a list none the least. A few people flashed though his mind, but he was still doused in a sleep fogged mind to actually put that list into any use as he grew closer to the door. Only to be surprised to see a casually dressed Hannibal Lecter standing politely on his front porch, hands loosely clasped in front of him, it was clear he had heard Will call out. As he paid the front door no mind as he slowly looked around the area he stood in, taking in the porch decorations. Hannibal even reached out to lightly caress one of the wind chimes and watched as he let it go so it could sing out a delicate tune as it rejoined its comrades. The four dogs that raced around the house all sat patiently around looking up at him, as intrigued with his appearance as Will was.

Hannibal looked away from the wind chime and seemed to slightly perk up as he noticed Will's approach. "Good morning Will, I hope I did not disturb your sleep." Hannibal greeted with a soft smile as he watched Will fully step towards the door and open it.

"Uhm, no I've been up for a while," Will answered as held onto the door, making it a clear sign that he was battling with idea of letting Hannibal inside his house or not. "What brings you by?" He asked after a few beats of silence that had fallen between the two.

"May I come in?" Hannibal asked avoiding the question by asking his own, away to gain control of the topic. As his eyes searched passed Will to take in the other's house, before bringing them back over to Will. As if he was making sure that the man was actually alone in his own home, well as alone one could be with seven dogs. Will took in a deep breath, mulling over if he should bend to Hannibal's request of being let inside or not. Here he had canceled last night's appointment, because a part of him was not yet ready to handle the idea of seeing the man face to face. And here the man was standing outside on his porch, nicely dressed ready for the day and Will was still in his sleepwear, prolonging the rest of the day. Once again proving to him how opposite they could be compared with one another.

"Sure." Was all Will said as he stepped aside and Hannibal lightly bowed his head in thanks, before he walked in followed by the rest of Will's pack. "You going to tell me why you decided to drive an hour's length over to my place?" Will asked as he closed his door and turned towards Hannibal, who loosely began to walk around his reading space. Eyes flicking over his bookshelf, to Will it looked like Hannibal was just browsing what selection he owned, but to Hannibal he was searching for something particular. Only stopping when he noticed the worn greying red spine of *The Phantom of The Opera*. A microscopic smile played at his lips when he spotted it, if Will wasn't standing only a few feet away, he would have reached out and plucked the novel from the nook it sat in. To open the most likely stiff book and run his fingers over the rough pages, as an image of an adolescent Will Graham emerged in his mind. Sitting in a worn recliner, that did nothing but dwarf his size, and with his nose buried deep in the words that lay upon the just as worn pages. Untamed imagination claiming the books imagery as it's victim while he took in the story with greed.

"Do you have any coffee?" Hannibal turned away from the book self, eyebrow slight raised and head tilted faintly to the side. Once again reminding Will, who he was taking to. Will really needed to learn that he would never get a clear answer out of the doctor and it was too early to jump through the already placed hoops that Hannibal had set up. Will let out a heavy breath and ducked his head down.

"I just brewed a cup a few minutes ago," Will answered as he walked away from his door and towards his kitchen, "but the only way you are getting a cup is if you answer my question." He added.

"A fair trade I like to believe." Hannibal followed a few steps behind Will and took a seat on one of the wooden stools that sat on the other side of the counter. To watch as Will dug through one of his high cabinets, searching for a mug for his unexpected house guest. Once again unknowing teasing the man with a slight show of bare skin that peeked past his raised shirt pared with the slight V of his hips that the slightly low pajama pants helped show off. The ravenous urge to bite into that untainted pure skin made Hannibal's teeth ache and it

pared cruelly with the thought of seeing the mark his teeth would leave behind on the pale flesh. It was the slight clank of thick ceramic hitting the counter top that stopped Hannibal's mind from wondering too dangerously away from him and causing his own body to react to what those thoughts could enclose to him.

"It's no fancy coffee press like the one you have," Will breathed out as he brought the cup over to the coffee machine, "but it gets the job done." Will said as he began to pour Hannibal a cup. "Do you take anything in yours?"

"Just a spoon of sugar if you will." Hannibal watched as Will dumped a spoon full of sugar in the mug and gave it a few heavy stirs, making sure it was all dissolved before handing it over. It was clear Will wasn't trying to put on a show of hosting skills, much like Hannibal himself liked to do. His mind was far more focused on trying to figure why Hannibal had decided to show up out of nowhere, there had to be a clear reason for the house call, other than just wanting to see him in his sleepwear for the second time.

"Now will you inform me why the sudden visit?" Will once again asked, beginning to grow irritated with how he started to sound like a broken record, while he handed Hannibal his mug, before he leaned against the counter on the other side of the kitchen. As he watched Hannibal take a gingerly sip of his coffee. It occurred to Will of the role reversal that the two had found themselves in, his mind could not help but travel back to when he had visited Hannibal early one morning already dressed for the day and while Hannibal was in his pristine green probably silk robe offering him a crystal glass cup of coffee. Now Will stood in Hannibal's shoes offering the man a mug of basic coffee in a dark blue cotton blend robe, it had him wondering if Hannibal picked up the switch as well.

"This coffee is darker than what you mostly drink." Hannibal observed as he lowered his cup, he was expecting a medium dark roast. What he had consumed was much darker, it absorbed the one spoon of sugar that Will had dumped into it. Swallowing it whole and showing no sign of it ever existing in the first place. It bit at his tongue with slightly sharp teeth and left a welcoming bitter taste behind, a way to make sure the consumer had more.

"Miranda got me hooked on a darker roast after introducing me to it." Will replied as he took a sip from his own mug. Hannibal had to force down the snarl that was brought on by the mention of Miranda's name and it set his blood on a semi boil. It also reminded him of the reason why for his sudden unexpected visit to the other's house.

"Speaking of Miranda," Hannibal spoke as he set down the mug, no longer interested in drinking it after finding out the reason for its existence in Will's home. "She is the reason for why I am here." Will raised an eyebrow and set down his own mug, crossing his arms closely around his chest and adjusting his stance.

"What do mean?" Will asked eyes slightly narrowed as he his mind tried to predict what ever sentence might leave Hannibal's mouth. "What does Miranda have to do with you suddenly dropping by so early in the morning?"

Hannibal let out a heavy sigh and lowered his head, intentionally deflating his body as he readied himself for the part he had prepared to play for Will's eyes and Will's eyes alone. "She had called my last night. It was after the opera." Hannibal had begun as he focused on

his hands that were tightly clasped together, a false sign of distressed. He had to rely on his voice and body language to help fool Will's empathy, if he could fool the man's eyes than his empathy would not pick up on the performance that was being played in front of him.

"That must have been past ten at night." Will's voice was low as he pieced last night together in his mind. Miranda had dropped him off at home around nine fifty-five. She had taken him to the opera saying how she wanted to do some of the driving, because she thought it was fair after all he had done most of if not all the driving since they began to pick one another up for their dates. He even invited her inside to spend some more time together as they let the nights event travel over them, but she had voiced the excuse of having to pack for her trip in the morning. Meaning she must have called Hannibal after she had left his house.

"Yes, it was quite late in the night, which had come as such as a surprise to me," Hannibal looked up from his hands and searched to capture Will's eyes, but they flickered around in an unrhythmic motion. "Along with the reason behind the sudden phone call." Will's eyes quickly flicked upwards and his lips slightly pursed, a look of slight confusion. No longer focused on trying to predict what Hannibal might want to tell him and just relying on when he was going to be given the slowly fed information.

"And what was the reason behind the phone call?"

"It is difficult to put into words," Hannibal breathed out, "the conversation she tried to have with me didn't really hold any topic and by the time I gathered that information I was able to indicate by the way she spoke to me and the way she had phrased her wording I realized quite late that she was flirting with me the whole conversation." Hannibal looked at Will with anguished eyes, as he searched for any indication of what emotion might be going through Will's mind. He hoped it was the sinking heavy feeling of betrayal as his words hit the right emotional nerve points, leaving Will with a cold numbness that over casted his body and mind the second everything settled in.

"She called you in the middle of the night to flirt with you?" Will asked as he slightly tilted his head and his eyes held the feeling of a ready to be born storm. Hannibal had to figure out where the storm was pointed at, it was clear that Will was holding on to a small buoyance of denial that floated into his mind. He did not believe the words Hannibal had spoken and Hannibal had to make sure that he would, or else everything could come around and strike at him. He would be painted in a negative light, and what Miranda had threatened him with the night prior would become jaggedly true. "Forgive me if I don't exactly come out and believe you right away."

"It wasn't the first time she has shown the same behavior towards me," Hannibal said as he leaned back on the stool, unclasping his hands and one dropped to rest on his thigh while the other rested on the counter top. A show of openness pointed towards the other's eyes, that were searching for any sign in the body language that could point towards Hannibal lying to him. Too bad for Will Hannibal was prepared for that and came ready to blind those searching eyes in any means necessary. "I must confess I did lie to you the other night Will, when you asked me who had called and I told you it was a telemarketer." Hannibal continued as he picked up the mug and slightly began to swirl it, before his eyes harshly flicked upward trapping Will's gaze in an iron hold. "But we both knew that didn't we, you just wanted to

believe the lie I had told you. Isn't that true Will?" He sipped at his still warm coffee, as he watched Will shift in his stance. That harden edge that Will had begun to form was starting to crack at the sudden attack.

"But that can be discussed on a later date," Hannibal set down the mug and freed Will from the hold he had trapped him. "The more prominent part is the truth and the truth was that Miranda had called that night and I had all intentions to relay a message over to you, but she did not want that. I thought it was odd at that point, why call if not to talk with you." Another sip, another prolonged moment between the two and Hannibal picked up the discomfort that was slowly coming off of Will, that was mixing well with the untapped hostility that lay just below the surface. That looked for a fixed point to lash out at and Hannibal was all too generous to give it that point. "I believe she had the intention to talk to you, but once I picked up the phone, she merely changed her focus and thus began the act of flirtation."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Will's voice was even lower than before and colder, icicles must have formed on his vocal cords. The hostility was rising past the discomfort and starting to take shape, it was going to be a cold anger, the kind you could not predict the out lash. Where words were spoken with an even tone and face lacking emotion. It would have you wondering if the person was actually angry or not, only when you looked into that person's eyes and see the burning fire that rolled inside then would you realize that yes, in fact that they were indeed angry.

Hannibal let out a perfectly deflated breath and tilted his mug, "I honestly do not know why I had lied to you that night. Perhaps I was confused over the ordeal as soon as it happened. Not willing myself to believe that Miranda had decided to taint your relationship with such a deceitful act. Trapping myself in the gilded cage of denial and hoping I could later leave that cage, never to look back at it. Sweep it all under the rug, pay it no mind."

"But then Miranda had called you again. How did she get your phone number?"

"I'm not entirely sure, because she called my cellphone and I do not have that listed anywhere online. She might have collected it from somewhere else." Hannibal speculated, knowing fully well how Miranda had gathered his number and waited to see if Will might jump to the same conclusion, by the heavy breath that escaped his lungs Hannibal was proven right.

"She had asked me the other night if she could borrow my phone, apparently she was having issues with her cellphone and needed to make a quick call." Will shook his head and turned his attention to look out the small window. "She must have looked up your number without my knowledge." Will shifted his stance and rubbed both hands over his face. Trying desperately not to believe what he was just told. He believed he knew Miranda better than this. She had reassured him that she was happy in their relationship. The call they had just a few weeks ago where he had poured out all his doubts to her and how she had calmed his racing mind. Dousing out those fiery doubts with understanding words and a reassuring mind. Was that all an act, just to make sure that he stayed tied around her finger. Being lead around on a bedazzled leash like a love sick puppy, until she was ready to unclip his collar and let him run off. Never bothering to even call out to him. Was that all, had he just called

her out and she had to act quickly before Will pulled the wool from his eyes. Breaking it off between them before she could turn the act on him. But that couldn't be the truth, could it?

"Are you certain that Miranda was flirting with you? Because she has this way with others, you might have misread her intentions." Will turned away from the window with a slight trace of hope in his expression and began to search Hannibal's face for confirmation. But Hannibal looked down at his coffee and slowly shook his head. Ready to snuff out that small delicate flame of hope that Will had managed to light.

The man let out a slight humorless laugh. "It might have been a while for myself, but I do know when other's flirt with me Will." He looked up from his cup with a soft serous expression. "I did not misread the situation I'm afraid. Miranda was indeed flirting with me the other night and how she had gathered my personal phone number should be proof enough, shouldn't it?"

The answer was a blatant *yes*. Will wanted to believe that the Friday night call was a misunderstanding. It was getting late, they had spent the whole day replacing a faucet, before that Hannibal was preparing for a dinner party. So, slight fatigue could be played into a misunderstanding between the two. Then it all could be left in the past and they could all just move along, like Hannibal wanted to do that night it happened. A part of Will could live with that, no harm done in a simple misunderstanding. But then Miranda had gone through his phone and gathered Hannibal's phone number. Just to call Hannibal after their date at the opera, there was no way Will could find an excuse to ignore that. But then again, he was only being given one side of the story, he couldn't just jump to such a conclusion of Miranda wanting to cheat on him with Hannibal. Will realized he needed to hear her side of the story soon, or else it threated to eat away at him like maggots on a corps.

Will leaned away from the counter and briskly walked away to locate his cellphone. He knew Miranda had not left for the airport. It was still early; she was more than likely still at home getting ready for the long trip. He recalled how she mentioned her departure time to him and how it was one of those odd scheduled flights where it wasn't during a more rounded time. Not in the early mornings and not in the afternoon, somewhere in between that would have the passengers scrambling to try and figure out what a good time to head over might be.

Will located his phone on his nightstand and began to search for Miranda's number. His mind buzzed and his heart was pumping heavily, he could not pinpoint why though. Could it be anxiety, could it be anger, or could it be fear from the harsh truth that a part of him did not want to hear. All those emotions brought out the same effect that led to such a frantic behavior. Realizing this made Will slow his process as he took a deep breath and let the calming effect lightly travel over him. Dulling the buzz that wrapped around his mind like an electric field and slowly easing his running heart into a slow stride.

I need to calm myself down, Will thought to himself as he took one more deep breath. *The last thing to do is to make this call with a wired mind. Can't let my emotions speak for me, sharpen my tongue and drip venom into my words, when there might be no need for it. Things will end badly if I let that happen.* With a cleared mind Will managed to pull up Miranda's number, that's when a new feeling emerged, slithering past the three that he thought he felt, during his time searching through his phone. It bubbled through the cracks and began to

spread over his thoughts and feelings. *Hesitation*. Just a few seconds ago Will was ready to make the call, to ease his wondering mind and find a way to push out all the infectious thoughts that Hannibal placed inside him. But now as he stared down at the call icon, thumb hovering over it, he could not find the strength to press it. *What is wrong with me? One moment I was ready for confrontation now I'm about to turn tail and run. I know the term ignorance is bliss, but is it worth it when so much has come the surface. Lecter obviously no longer feels comfortable with Miranda and he drove all this way to address it with me face to face instead of letting it go on like an unchecked fire that was left behind by neglectful campers.*

Will looked up from his phone and slowly walked to where he could lay his eyes on Hannibal. Who had his back turned to Will, and Will watched as one of his dogs; Orion walked up to Hannibal. Placed his head on the man's thigh, Hannibal looked down at the dog with a warm smile, before reaching down and lightly scratched the top of his head, before rubbing one of Orion's pointed ears. "I'm going to give Miranda a call." Was all Will said as he turned the corner and walked outside to stand on his front porch. Not giving enough room for Hannibal to address the statement. Leaving him in the company of the dog, who was soaking up the attention brought to him with greed.

Hannibal rubbed the dog's ear for a few more seconds, growing the space of time that stood between Will's statement and the time he had left the house to stand on the porch. Before he stood up from the stool and slowly made his way to the front of the house. Stepping up to the front door and peering through the glass, taking in how Will held the phone to his head while his other arm was wrapped tight around his midsection. The unease that radiated off of him was palpable, so strong that Hannibal could feel it pouring in through the wooden door. He watched as Will slowly began to pace back and forth, obvious that he was trying rid himself of the restless negative energy that was quickly building up inside of him. Pressing hard against his chest, coiling around him, and slowly squeezing until his lugs felt a more physical effect. Hannibal reached for the door knob and carefully turned it, somewhat thankful the Will found the time to make sure that the hinges were properly looked after. As he carefully opened the door, enough to break the seal from the outside and gift him with what was happening on the porch between Will and Miranda.

"I'm not accusing you of anything Miranda." Will breathed out as he stopped the short pace, not even realizing that he had started the movement until he put a stop to it. Hannibal watched as Will placed his hand on his forehead and let out a deep breath. It was deceitfully tempting to walk out onto the porch and witness the conflict first hand. To be able to sit down on one of those tacky lawn chairs, lean back and enjoy it all unravel thanks to his guided hand.

"It's just that Hannibal came over this morning and confided in me what happened last night and the Friday night prior," Will leaned against the porch his head deeply hung low, shoulders dipping downward. "No I'm not taking his side and again I am not accusing you of anything. The reason I called is so that we can clear all this up and move forward." Will quickly leaned away from the railing. Hannibal slightly recoiled from the door, stepping a little to the side to stay out of Will's view and to keep his presence small, unknowing. Before easing himself back to his previous stance to continue to watch the show Will unknowingly

preformed for the other. Will turned away from the rail, to lean against it, his free hand wrapping tightly around the wooden beam, grounding him to the one spot.

“I want to hear your side that’s all I’m asking for Miranda, nothing more nothing less. Before you take off and we have the whole United States between us. Is that too much to ask for?” Hannibal could hear the anger and frustration mixing well in Will’s voice and how he wished to be able to collect that tone and cherish it for years to come.

It seems the issue is staring to reach it’s designated boiling point; a few more portions of agitated words from Rhettford’s end and a small amount of probing from you Will and we’ll have something worth plating. Hannibal lightly smirked as he watched as Will ran hand frustratingly through his hair. Causing the already wild mess of curls to become even more askew and a physical sign of his frustration that he tried so desperately to keep inside himself.

Release that frustration Will, open that tightly clutched caged door and let it poor out of you. I stirred the emotion, now all you have to do is let it out. Remove the faulting grip that you have, unlock your jaw, and let that sharp tongue of yours cut the air around you. You know you want to Will, all you have to do is let go.

Will let out a heavy huff of a breath and his body slightly began to deflate on the spot. “Alright I understand you are not in the *mood* to talk about this any further,” Will turned around and leaned on the railing once more. Head hung low and shoulders pulled up tight, as he tried to get his body to relax into the lean. As he put all his weight onto the railing, before he lifted his head, just to stare at the lone tree that was growing in the middle of his front yard. “We’ll just have to talk about it once you get back. I hope you have a safe flight and everything goes right for you.” Hannibal knew the conversation was coming quickly to a close, he subtly closed the front door and made his way back to where he previously sat, to wait until Will came back inside.

Will lowered the phone from his ear and felt a hard buzz under his skin that coated his mind as the last bit of the call seeped into his mind. Buried itself deep into his thoughts, as he tried to figure out how the phone call ended the way it had. He thought of Miranda as cool, calm, and collective. Able to stand her ground, but still listen to reason when faced with an opposing thought. But over their discussion, Will let out a near biter chuckle at the word discussion. Because what they just shared was farthest from a normal discussion. Will felt more like he was walking in circle, trying to get Miranda to open honestly to what he was trying to tell her. She sounded harsh and defensive on the other end; her words had hit him with a hot open palm. Causing him to stumble for footing as he tried to grab hold of the spiraling situation. While holding back his own hot words that built dangerously close to his mouth and were all too ready to be let out. He did not want to feel frustration during the call, he wanted to avoid the harsh feeling as much as possible, but the way Miranda talked to him, it was hard to battle back the negative feeling.

Miranda was the one to bring up the idea of cutting off the conversation that teetered dangerously into forming an ugly argument and Will found himself all to ready to agree with offering that was laid out in front of him. He found a certain unsettling relief when they said their goodbyes. That were filled with mixed feelings and odd promises to keep in touch while

they went through the long distance for the next couple of days. No longer in the heavy presence of the unsuccessful attempt to retrieve Miranda's side of the conflict with Hannibal. Will realized after the call had ended that Miranda had never given him an answer, she just walked around the question while throwing unsavory accusations his ways.

Here Will thought the morning started out well. He had a rare full night's rest, where he hadn't woken up from a twisted corps filled dream. Soaked in the nice weather that surrounded his house paired with just as nice cup of coffee. Along with the reminisce of the opera that still washed over him when he turned his attention towards the memory. Now he watched as what could have been a nice day slowly wash down the drain, Will didn't even feel the need to reach out and plug the drain as he watch it all slip away from him. He could not bring himself to bother and just watch it happen in front of him. Will stayed leaning against the railing, trying to clear his thoughts, and rid himself of the heavy weight that he felt slowly being pressed down onto him. He just wanted to stand there, trapped in an illusion of frozen time. To believe that life would stand still as long he stood on the porch, phone loosely in one hand and the other pressed to himself as he took in what the light cool air had to offer. That was until he remembered he was not alone, that someone waited for him just on the other side of the door. Ready to disturb the illusion that Will was trying to form. With a deep breath Will stood straight, turned, and walked back inside ready for time to move forward.

"How did the discussion with Miranda turn out?" Hannibal asked as he watched as Will walked around the counter and reclaimed his spot from earlier. Will picked up his forgotten coffee and stared down at for a few seconds, his eyes flickering around tightly as he tried to figure out if he wanted to have this conversation or not. It would be so easy just tell Hannibal that he did not want to talk about it, just leave sleeping dogs lie and move on. But then again it might be good just to get it all out in the open and see what could possibly happen.

"Not well," Will stated as he leaned deeply into the counter, before taking a time expanding sip of his coffee, somewhat grateful that it still held some warmth to it. "I tried to figure out her side of story, see what happened between you two was as blatant as flirtation or maybe some poorly sculpted form of misunderstanding, but the more I tried to get a clear answer from her the more she pushed back." Will set down his mug and flinched when the ceramic clanked a bit too hard for his liking. "It came to the point I felt that we were on the verge on a full-blown fight." He sighed his eyes searching around the kitchen, intentionally bouncing around Hannibal's form instead of looking the other face on.

"It was bound to happen I'm afraid," Hannibal breathed out as he held his mug with both hands, looking down at it with just his eyes. "A squabble between couples is common, its ineffable. No relationship can go on without an argument lingering under the surface ready to take form and rise to the surface. Cracking what most would like to consider something stable." Hannibal took a sip from his coffee and looked up to be gifted the sight of Will's gaze on him. The brunet was looking for reassurance, looking for someone to tell him that it was common that arguments happened in even what others would like to believe was a steady relationship. And Hannibal was all too generous to give Will that reassurance, to help the other lean more into his side than Miranda's.

“I know fights happen in relationships and I know at some point that it was bound to happen between Miranda and I,” Will sucked in his bottom lip and gently bit into the tender flesh. “I just didn’t think it would happen today.”

“Fights do not have a planned date or time; they emerge like a heavy fog and cover the ground with its thick haze. Blinding those who find themselves surrounded by the damp air as they look for a way out.”

“Perhaps I need to be lost in the fog for a bit, find out where it is I need to go and why it emerged in the first place.” Will’s voice was airy as he turned his head to look away from Hannibal and back out the small kitchen window. Ready to submerge his thoughts in that heavy fog and just let himself float with the thick air. But unbeknownst to him, Hannibal was not going to let Will drift slowly away from him.

Hannibal set down his mug, intentionally harder than necessary to cause the ceramic to sing out and draw Will’s attention back to him. “Perhaps, but I do not recommend that you do and I do not intend to let that happen. Not while you are in my presence that is. After we part ways, then you may feel free to get lost in the tempting fog and become astray once again. But while I am here, let me guide you out of it. Distract you for the time being.” Will turned back to Hannibal and cocked his head to the side and raised an eyebrow.

“And how do you plan to distract me?” He asked voice just shy of a teasing tone, which had the left side of Hannibal’s lips twitch upward. The list to distract Will was near endless, one idea as delightfully dark as the last and all just as enticing to put into action. But at the moment the list Hannibal had carefully crafted over the time he had known Will would not come into fruition until Will was ready. Only then would those ideas come to life and take form for both of them to enjoy. Of course some of those ideas would suit his taste more than his Will’s, but Hannibal never said he wasn’t a selfless now did he.

“If I am correct, it is safe to assume that you had not had breakfast yet this morning.” Hannibal said and Will just shrugged nonchalantly.

“You would be assuming right, but I’m not really a breakfast person. I just drink a cup of coffee and I’m good until lunch. Of course some days I’d fix me some toast or a simple bowl of cereal, but those days are far few in between.” Will answered, taking a sip of coffee just to emphasize his point.

“Well that simply won’t do will it,” Hannibal huffed and stood up, Will could see where this was going and he quickly leaned away from the counter. “Why don’t I make us something to enjoy.” He offered as he began to walk around the counter to enter the kitchen space, only to stop when Will blocked his path.

“You really don’t have to do that Hannibal.” Will said as he adjusted his stance, an attempt to keep the man out of his kitchen.

“I insist.” Hannibal smiled, with a tilt of his head and small lean to help push pass Will’s block without coming off as pushy if not noticed. It also gave him the chance to enter Will’s personal space, where he could gather the soft natural warm fragrance that was Will’s, that sadly was hidden under that imposing cologne. Hannibal had thought about taking the chance

of isolation that Will had given him to locate that bottle and dispose of it properly. Of course he would disguise it as an accident, perhaps one of the many dogs accidentally knocked it over. But he found himself wrapped in the enticing embrace of the one-sided conversation that took place on the porch.

“But you are technically my guest.” Will countered as he stood his ground.

“That is correct, but I did act as the harbinger of bad news, along with the fact that I did invite myself over without notice. So it would only be acceptable for me to offer cooking us a proper homemade breakfast.” Hannibal smiled, showing off a glint in his eyes, once again trying to push the boundaries Will had set up. As if he just made a move that Will could not counter, but Will had prepared to put up a fight. He might have bent easily when Hannibal offered to make him a meal Friday, but the man was in his house and he held the home advantage. Where Will had more to help hold him up from Hannibal’s attempt at getting him to bend in his favor.

“That may be true Hannibal, yet you are still labeled as a guest and I would not feel comfortable with a guest going through all the trouble of cooking a meal by themselves in my kitchen.” Will said, with a slight smirk playing at the edge of his lips, with a matching glint in his own eyes. The two stood silently in the playful standoff. Will waiting to see what Hannibal might say to counter his point and Hannibal enjoying the push back Will was showcasing.

“How about we compromise then,” Will held a small look of confusion, expecting another round of back and forth with the psychiatrist. Hannibal smiled inwardly at being able to catch Will off guard. “Why don’t we just make something together. That way you don’t feel ashamed for having a guest cook by themselves in your kitchen and I can make up for the unexpected visit.” He offered. Will leaned a bit back as he weighed the offer in his head.

“I guess that makes sense,” Will thought out loud as he slid his hands in his robe pockets, noticing how Hannibal perked up at the approach to an agreement. “But than again do you really need two people to put frozen waffles in a toaster?” He asked as he slightly turned his body to give a quick look at his toaster that sat neatly against his bread box, before looking back over at Hannibal with innocently questioning eyes.

Hannibal straightened his stance and held a baffled look, his eyes slightly wide and jaw only a little ajar. He looked as if Will had just told him that Jack was no longer going to try and hunt down the Ripper and instead pass on the task to some stumbling newbie. While he faced on a greater foe who might becoming out of the woodwork as they speak.

“I mean,” Hannibal started, “there surely must be something you.” Hannibal stopped himself when he noticed that mischievous look that rippled over Will’s feature as he fought back a smile. Pleased that he managed to fool Hannibal even for a split second, something that Will would hold close for when he needed to elevate his mood when it threated to sink fast on him. Upon realizing the ruse Hannibal sent Will an amused smile and Will fully smirked in returned, no longer hiding the fact he was pleased with what he accomplished, even letting a small chuckle pass his lips.

“I’ll go get dressed and when I come back, we can start on making breakfast,” Will stated as he walked past the other, opening up the kitchen. “But I better not hear a single burner turn on while I’m gone.” Will called out as he turned the corner missing the fond amused look painted on Hannibal’s face, along with the soft breathless chuckle that only the dogs could pick up.

Their breakfast contained bacon, eggs, southern style hashbrowns, and a slice of toast. It took them another round of back and forth to designate who prepared what. Both wanting to handle the eggs and with Will insisting that he was fine battling the occasional hot oil that would pop off the pan when it came to the bacon. Hannibal had managed to talk Will into taking over the home made hashbrown and leave the bacon duty to himself, while he offered to have Will cook his own egg since he had no idea how Will liked them served. But while Will was frying the diced potatoes, Hannibal had already started to work on Will’s serving. Which had earned him a scrunched narrow look from Will, along with an eyeroll as he turned back to continued working on the hashbrowns and off handedly voiced how he preferred his eggs over easy.

As they cooked, Hannibal could not help, but be memorized with how well they worked together in the square space. Managing to move around each other as the completed their own separate task, filling spots that the other left opened and taking the time to offer the other a hand when one would reach out. They were a working pair as though it was always ment to be that way, that they were suppose to share moments like these. Hannibal now and then would just stop in his own task and just take in the moment as it danced around them. Letting the warmth that lounged in the kitchen, that was made by them fill his nerves and encourage himself to keep building on the scene that was crafted by their own selves. How he found himself wishing in the farthest part of his mind for more similar times like these to share with Will. Perhaps if his well-constructed plan kept working out, he might be gifted more of these moments.

The two soon found themselves sharing a spot at Will’s dinning table, enjoying the fruits of their labor. Not really saying much to each other and more the lines appreciating the others presence. As they sat across from each other. The sound of forks hitting ceramics and the sound of still sizzling food played like music through the room.

“You did a wonderful job on the hashbrowns.” Hannibal commented as he gathered the small cubes of potatoes onto his fork. “For someone who claims to not partake in the morning ritual that is breakfast, you pulled it off very well.” He added after swallowing the bite and looked up to see Will holding a crooked smile, while he dipped a piece of toast into the bright silky yellow yoke of his eggs.

“You did pretty good with the eggs, even if you couldn’t work with all those exotic spices you like to use.” Will offered not looking up from his plate as he gathered his own pits of hashbrowns. “Besides kinda had to prove to you that I indeed know how to cook a proper meal.” He added an airy chuckle, before taking the food into his mouth. Pleased at the light crunch of the skin that concealed the soft airy potatoes, along with nips from the black pepper. Another example about something so simple bringing a welcoming ease to his mind and body.

“And proven yourself you did.” Hannibal said as he captured a soft smile that appeared on Will’s face, before turning his attention back to his own plate. “Tell me Will what are your plans for the rest of the day?”

Will just shrugged as he dug around his plate, “I have an afternoon lecture at two and another one at five, beside’s that nothing much else is going on,” Will answered, “what about you?” He asked finally turning his attention to Hannibal.

“Just the regular Friday appointments.”

“I’d ask you more about that, but doctor patient confidentiality and all that.” Will said and noticed the slight amusement that traveled over Hannibal’s feature and the light lift and fall of his shoulders. Before he turned back to his meal.

“Sadly that does keep my lips sealed from conversation, but you do not follow the same guide lines for your work,” Hannibal set down his fork and looked up at Will with his hands neatly folded, “so mind indulging me about the topic of the lesson you are planning to bestow upon the next generation of FBI’s finest?” He asked.

Will slowly set his fork down and turned his attention back to Hannibal. It was odd to be asked about the other aspect to his job. He was so accustomed with only talking about the profiling and field work. It had him believing that a lot of others often forgot that he was a professor first and a special agent second. To talk about his teaching wasn’t new to him, but it still felt forgotten. Pushed into the corner to collect dust over time, until someone accidentally brought attention to it, like at the moment. Where Hannibal actually looked generously curious to know how his teaching went. That was when that odd feeling returned to him, but it wasn’t that wet flicker he found himself feeling when trapped in near intimate proximity with the man. No this was that gentle feather like flutter that rippled over his nerves, gently kissing at every exposed point that it came across. While his eyes searched around the older man, as if looking for a reason to diminish this feather like touch. That to this point he only felt towards Miranda and now it was coming to life while he shared a morning with Hannibal.

It was confusing, he thought he was starting to understand why this feeling emerged with Miranda. To him Miranda shown signs of a willing pillar for him, someone outside his world he could lean on and decompress around without falling down a rabbit hole of analyzing and unease. That brought out the feeling of a promised domestic life that waited just around the corner the more that they were together. Along with a world he could step into when the one he roamed around in felt like it was suffocating him, burying him alive in the endless amount of corpses that were thrown upon him. But now that flutter had presented itself to him while he sat across from Hannibal. While they had breakfast, that they had just finished making together not a few minutes prior. Will felt himself questioning the reliably of the flutter that still traveled through his chest and graced him with its light touches.

Will swallowed the remnants of the bite he had taken prior and pushed the questions aside to try and deal with later. Hopefully when he was alone and any butting emotions lay dormant, leaving his mind clear of anything, but what he had started to face. Before he turned his attention to what Hannibal had asked him as he tried to conceal any sign of confliction that rumbled inside of him.

Hannibal on the other hand easily picked up the small flickers of uncertainty that lightly traced at Will's mind. It was clear to him that he had managed to bring something forward inside the other, just like he had the night of the auction. But he could tell this wasn't the same feeling that Will tried to make sense of every time he purposely sought to bring out of the younger man, this was something new. Perhaps this was something just as damaging to the relationship between Will and Miranda. That helped grow that well planted seed of doubt he managed to farm just earlier this morning. Which had him fighting off a more sinister smile that played at his facial muscles, knowing that this was a clear sign of faulting behavior for the other. That this will have Will leaning more towards his pillar than towards Miranda's.

Navigating Through the Spider's Web

Chapter Summary

Another fly is caught in the Black Widow's web and t his time it looks as though the well maintained trap is not as flawless as others might believe.
With a fourth body and still no progress insight Jack decided it's best to finally reach out and see what the good doctor might have in mind. While they try to navigate though this web.

Chapter Notes

Another chapter in this fic that fought me tooth and nail to write, but here it is and I hope you all enjoy reading it. It's more case heavy than anything else in my own opinion. Guess it all can't be drama and fighting over Will's affection all the time oh well.
Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Black Widow had captured yet another fly in her tantalizing silk made web. Luring another unknowing soul into her sexual trap of desire, where she performed her show of promised unchained intimacy. Before shedding her well-made disguise of something that could be tamed by any man and striking with her venom dipped fangs, when her real self was put into the spot light. Where the man she had lured laid eyes on the monster he had fallen so easily for. Adding another body to her collection of slain victims.

Will stood just outside the room, leaning against the rough concrete wall of yet another nearly run down motel. That presented itself as though it was one missed payment away from shutting down, with chipped outer walls, a few windows that were decorated with spiderweb like cracks. Some did not have the luxury to even have glass, but instead were poorly boarded up. A warn square plastic cracked name sign that was a dirty white and only half illuminated, thanks to weather damage and poor upkeep. Sat near the entry way of the motel, with a deep dent in the metal poll it sat on top, probably caused by a careless driver. The sign was paired with a flickering green vacancy sign that seemed as though it could not make up its mind. Making it hard for those desperate enough to spend the money to rest there if it was open for new comers or not. Not that it seemed like the motel actually minded in the first place. As though it didn’t really care if it made money or not, it just sat on the side of the road like a wart that would never go away.

Will had his hands buried deep into his jean pockets; the cool wall matched easily with the cool early morning air that stung his skin with its embrace. He watched as the rain morphed the flashing red and blue lights of the police cars, before the drops hit the cracked pavement that made up the nearly deserted parking lot. Only a few cars; if one did not count the few police vehicles that acted as a backup barriers or what Will referred to them as a beckon for curious on lookers, were parked on the other side of the rectangular space. That made the area he stood in feel like it had a virus that would infect anyone who came within ten feet of it, giving the crime scene it's only bubble to fester in.

Like the last crime scene, not a lot of curious people roamed around the area, trying to either get a glance of the scene or trying to get their few seconds of fame thanks to the two news reporters that had pulled up, before Will arrived. Throughout his years with law enforcement Will could never understand how some news stations managed to sink their hungry claws into the knowledge of when a crime was committed and show up as fast as they often did. It sometimes made his gut twist when a news reporter would show up to a crime faster than an actual agent did. He was somewhat pleased to go unnoticed by the vultures as they monologed into the large cameras. Feeding the masses of those who found entertainment keeping an eye on the developing story, if one could even call what was happening a story. A story was made to entertain, to hold a moral that was reviled to the reader the more they invested their time to it. What was happening at the moment was no story, it was more of a warning of what the real world held in store for those who went through it blind.

He had snuck by the news reporters, passed under their radar as he ducked under the yellow crime scene tape and flashed one of the police officers who stood guard; that tried not to look upset with having to stand docile in the rain, his badge. While he made his way over to the only room that had its door open, as though welcoming him inside. Waiting to reveal what gruesome sight it held for his mind to wrap itself around, to offer him another body that will more than likely follow him into his dreams. Corrupting his night's rest and leaving him feeling raw from the sudden onslaught of death that plagued him in the real world that would now follow him into the subconscious realm of sleep. Will would have liked to have taken his time, when it came to entering the room, but thanks to the thick rain filled clouds that made the day seem like night, hiding the sun and morphing one's aspect of time. That had the heavy rain drops that collided with his body made him walk a tad bit faster than he would have liked. It seemed that mother nature did not want him prolonging his time away from the dead today.

Though Will did not mind the rain, somedays he would spend hours just sitting outside on his porch just listening to rain hitting the roof. Leaning back in his chair immersed in the rhythmic pattern and watching as the water fell, soaking the ground while the heavy clouds blocked out the sun. Feeling an enticing crave slowly form deep inside his chest, that had him thinking about standing up and just walk out from under the porch. Into the yard and let the free-falling water hit his skin, soak him to the core and feel as it washed away any stress or doubt that lingered in his cramped mind. As he stood in mother nature's embrace and let himself be bathed by her tears. Yet he never did, instead he just let himself imagine the refreshing feeling as he sat on his porch with a glass of whiskey in hand and watched the rain.

“Oh,” Beverly spoke as she stepped out into the doorway of the motel room, takin back to see Will already at the crime scene, bringing Will out of his hypnotic induced state brought on by the rain. “I didn’t expect to find you here.” She said as she stepped fully out of the room, turning her full attention to Will. “I was prepared to go hunt you down.” There was an airy chuckle to her words.

“Thought I save you the trip.” He said, still not moving himself from where he leaned on the wall, but turned his attention away from the weather and over to her. “Didn’t want you to get caught in the rain more than necessary over my account.” He added with a nonchalant shrug.

“Thanks for the consideration.” She smiled and pressed the side of her hip to the wall, before she crossed her arms as a sharp breeze ran past them. That managed to break through the two layers Will had put on and had him repressing the need to shiver. “But I’d rather be caught in the down pour than in there.”

“Fourth body to be dropped,” Will said as he turned away from her to continue to watch the rain, as he felt the agitated unease begin to float to the surface of his wired nerves. “We are still searching, still scrambling for answers, caught in the rising tide and now there is more blood in the water to attract the sharks.” He said voice on the verge of being monotone.

“I’d rather deal with blood thirsty sharks than a justice hungry Jack to be honest.” Beverly added as she leaned more into the wall and casted her attention to the rain as well. Seeming to fall into the same hypnotic trance that Will was facing. Closing her eyes and taking in the atmosphere that the weather was painting for them. “When I was a kid and it would rain like this, I remember just running out of my house with my siblings and just going crazy. We’d be splashing in puddles, playing in the mud, and just getting drenched.” Beverly said as she opened her eyes. “Now it’s just nice to watch it fall, to listen to and now and then step in that one enticing puddle.” She lightly chuckled and Will smiled fondly in return. “It’s just so calming to experience now; I blame the smell.” She smiled and looked over at Will.

“It’s the geosmin,” Will said as he took a soft deep inhale through his nose, catching the pleasant scent, that over powered the lingering cigarette smell that stained the outside air. “It’s produced by spores called actinomycetes that live in the soil. That travel into the air when the rain hits and that’s how you get that distinct earthy smell.” Will explained gesturing to the rain as he did so, letting his professor side show, before he turned over to Beverly. “But I didn’t really need to explain that to you did I.” He said with a one shoulder shrug.

Beverly hummed and made a small show of mulling Will’s words over. “No, but that doesn’t mean that I didn’t mind.” Beverly slowly leaned away from the wall, “it’s nice to hear you talk about something other than what goes on around the job. Let’s me see the other side of you that you don’t let show that often. I like it.” She smiled fondly and Will couldn’t help, but return the smile, though his was more wavery as he tried to keep it on his face. Once again proving to himself and others how foreign it was for him to receive genuine complements. Beverly let out a deep breath and adjusted her stance. “Well, better head back inside, before Jack realizes that I didn’t actually have to walk across the parking lot to go get you.”

“Hate to add fuel to the already blazing fire.” Will mumbled as he pushed himself off the wall and began to walk over towards the door, preparing himself for what laid in wait for his mind

to dissect. He followed Beverly inside, already drawing in on himself as he passed through the threshold. But even with all his mental preparation and barrier enforcing he did to ready himself, it did not stand a chance against the lung squeezing, chest tightening feeling that came crashing over him, like the heavy rain that poured outside. The solid feeling that sunk into his muscles and crushed his mind, it made Will stop slightly in his tracks as he fought to adjust to the invading feeling that had greeted him. It made his body feel stiff, as though his muscles were infusing themselves to his bones, becoming one as the collagen slowly over took the muscles, hardening them into place. He could feel his chest begin to tighten, the way his ribcage grew taut around his lungs with every shallow breath he could take. The sharp mind wrenching smell of copper that fought with the evading smell of grime, that claimed the small rooms air, did not help Will when he tried to expand the muscles of his chest. To defy the tightness that enclosed his lungs.

Will tried to push past the physical effect that the unexpected shift had caused him as he tried to figure out the reason why. Why the air felt heavier in this room than the two he had walked into prior, why he felt a near blinding hot sensation travel across his mind, and why did it have him grinding his teeth together and curling his once loose hands into tight fist?

Will began to look around the room to try and focus himself. He caught Zeller standing in the doorway of the bathroom. It's flickering light constantly changing the shadow on the man's face and obviously causing the investigator some annoyance as he looked over the small cramped area. Will then turned his eyes over to Beverly, who snapped on a pair of gloves as she walked over to the closest; that was missing its door. Will noticed Jimmy standing at the head of the bed, examining the reason for Will's presence. The man's focus was buried deep into the harsh cut that traveled over the dead man's throat. Finally there stood Jack, leaning on the far wall. Hand pressed to his mouth and his eyes were distant while he traveled through his mind. Trying to figure out what the next move the team should make and how fast they could make it. Even though the man looked calm and complaisant, Will knew as soon as someone disturbed that train of thought that Jack was traveling on. The frustration he felt towards the case would be released onto that poor soul.

Will turned his attention to the crooked queen-sized bed that sat in the middle if the cramped room, with its plain beige microfiber bed spread that tried to soak in the abundance of blood that had poured out on top of it earlier. The invading dark red liquid that seeped into the fabric had the beige turning into a darker shade of brown. The bedspread wasn't the only cloth that was tainted by the natural body liquid, the bleach white pillow cases; the only thing in the room that seemed at all pristine, also shared the unhealthy stain. Will's eyes traveled from the crumpled bedspread and towards the body that laid on top of it. The man's arms laid stiffly at his side, his dark eyes and slack jaw wide open, staring up at the celling in a never-ending silent scream, frozen in terror. Never to adjust back to its laxed self until someone came by to force his eyelids and his mouth shut. The only thing that covered his nude body was the deep red of the drying blood, that acted as a censor bar. Covering a body part that was no longer connected to the body. Will slowly walked over to the foot of the bed, trying to ignore how heavy his legs felt. The dull scent of blood brushed up against his nose as he took in all the victim's appearance.

The man's salt and pepper hair that resembled a bird's nest, matched the blood matted hair that grew on his chest. That barely covered the rough jagged skin of a bypass scar that

traveled down his chest. This man was thinner than Moore, but so were the last two victims. The groves of his ribs shown through loose skin. That use to be taunt around well-tuned muscles that were made during his youth. When his body acted like a well entuned machine and was treated like one as well. But as soon as his body began to age and started to show those signs, whether that be lightly formed wrinkles or no longer able to keep up with the routine that he grew accustom too. This man had given up, fed up with no longer able to keep up with his old self and his body. Unlike Salazar who grasped to stay forever young, with any means necessary, this man accepted age without grace. Even though he looked as though he could fall into the lines of being referred to as distinguish in his aged, which Will would put at mid-sixties. Unlike Moore, this man was not baring a wedding ring, but Will did notice the slight yellow stain on the man's fingertips. So he wouldn't be surprised when Beverly pulled out a box of cigarettes from the man's pocket while she looked for the wallet.

Will's eyes traveled away from the body and up towards the wall, wondering what name the Black Widow decided to leave them this time. What crude word was going to be carved into the wooden wall, to be a blistering scar for the motel to bare for the rest of existence. Because it was clear that the owner of the place was not going to cough up the money to have the wall fixed. Perhaps after the case is closed and the room is no longer an active crime scene, maybe they would just boarder up the room. Take all the mix matching furniture that was left; which wasn't much. Just a three-drawer wooden dresser that was missing the third drawer. A night stand that held a lamp that was missing its shade and a small round plastic table that sat by the window, obviously made to be put outside on someone's porch. Not inside a motel room, with no chairs to partner with it. But by impression left in the brown shagged carpet that was becoming matted, the table might have once had a chair for the person who stayed in the room to sit in. All these things would more than likely be moved out of the room, to either just be thrown in the dumpster or placed in another room. Will leaned on the option of being put in another room, the place looked like to was struggling financially, so the owners were going to cut corners any chance they got.

Will began to list any possible derogatory names that could be thrown at woman in his mind. Any name that could leave a mental scar when dug deep enough into the skin, draw out the right negative energy by those who were spit at. Who came in contact with cruel titles, by those who found words a more satisfying way to harm someone. Who wanted the victim to continue on with their day with their hate filled voice and gnarly words burying deep into their subconscious. With hope that the name would last far longer than anything else that was inflicted onto them. All the names he could try to think of, that he could recall from years of being exposed to rowdy individuals. That were spoken with slurred speech from drunks, or unhinged jaws from aggressive criminals who fought against the arrest. All the names he tried to file through his mind, helped prepare him for the vulgar word that scarred the wall.

Cunt

An insult that most if not all American's tended to avoid saying, sticking towards words that still stung like bitch, whore, or slut. Those were more commonly cursed; the words sometimes would land a sharp sting to those who's ears were exposed to the insult. This word that now infested the wall, like a hostile virus, was beyond those three words all together. This word when spoken lashed out at the victim, it sunk its sharp teeth into the person's mind and brought out a visual reaction. When called anything else someone might be able to brush

the insult off, to not show any sign of feeling agitated or hurt by it. Not this word, when this word slithered out of someone's unkept mouth a reaction was bound to happen. It was mostly shock, thanks to vulgar meaning behind the word and being so uncommon in America. So when it was brought out all anyone could feel is taken back, before another reaction could be shown.

Will left where he stood and walked closer to the wall, he could feel the same intense heat that radiated around his skull as he stared up at the jagged word. It pulsed with a strong hatred, as if the killer had managed to trap her emotion into this one word. Unlike the first three words she carved into the wall, when she was pouring out her anger with herself, this one managed to hold onto the emotion she felt, with a tight unbreaking grip. But this was not anger, what was lingering in this room was elevated above it. What this emotion she had felt left such a mark that it seeped into Will as soon as he entered the room. It had tried to latch onto him, to make him it's new host as soon as he stepped through the open doorway. Infect him like it had her, quickly boiling up to the surface until it had him acting in its frenzy favor. Losing control of any part of himself that fought to resist the hot flood of emotion that spread over his mind.

You did not feel anger when you carved this message into the wall, Will thought as he looked over the jaded carving, he did not feel the need to reach out an examine it like the last message. But something told him that if he did, that the word would radiate a strong heat. A heat that the Black Widow felt as she took her weapon, she used to end this man's life and stabbed it into the wall for the first time. *No you felt something stronger, you felt rage. But why, if this man was like the last three then there was nothing to provoke such an emotion. So why did you feel rage when you had complete control over this situation?* Will questioned. *Unless this rage wasn't linked towards the act you had laid out in front of you.*

"Crude isn't it." Will jerked out of his thoughts, when Jimmy spoke for the first time. It was clear the man did not notice his effect on Will, still too focused on the body. "I mean out of all the words to use." He said looking up at Will with a slight look of disdain.

"And what word would you use?" Zeller called out from where he stood, "Given all the ones our purp has used so far, are we really that surprised." Zeller said as leaned out of the doorframe, "I mean she already used the big three when you think about it, now she has to get creative."

"I don't exactly know what word I would have carved into the wall," Jimmy stood straight and looked over to Zeller, "I just know I wouldn't use *that* word." Jimmy said as he gestured towards the wall with his head before he went back to examining the body.

"All I know is, if someone called me that," Beverly spoke up as she leaned out of the closet, "they'd be facing something far worse than that guy." She added jabbing her flashlight towards the corps, and giving the three men a smirk, before disappearing back into the closet. Will caught Zeller mouthing the words 'wow' before he turned and went back into the bathroom.

Leaving Will to refocus his thoughts on the crime scene, trying to figure out what could have possibly happened to cause the Black Widow to feel such a harsh emotion. What had caused her anger to evolve into the harsher and more difficult to control feeling of rage. Will stepped

away from the body, to give himself some space from the feeling of rage that poured off of the crime scene like the thick smoke off of a cigar. Breaking away from the clawing emotion that still tried to bury itself into Will's mind, so he could focus on the reasoning for the unwanted feeling. When he stood a good distance, Will closed his eyes, and took in a deep mind settling breath. He did not need to submerge himself fully into her mindset. Even though she left such a large piece of herself behind for him to step into. No, he just needed to skim the surface, to peak into just a small part of herself, that would be willing to tell him why she had left such a slithering piece of herself behind in the first place.

It did not take Will long to focus his mind, as he flipped through the reenactment of the scene that played out for him. He quickly flipped past the standard part that the killer always preformed. Passed the luring and passed the seduction, until he came to the point of the attack. That would revile the reason for the birth of the strong mind-altering emotion that bubbled to the surface like rising lava. When he arrived to the part of the kill, was when he was given the insight he was looking for and the feeling he felt was not rage, but more of a free fall. Like the carpet had been pulled out from under him and had left himself stumbling in place. While he tried to grasp onto something to hold onto, to stop his descent. That's when he felt *it.*

Will took a deep choppy breath as he knocked himself out of the small submersion and the act had caught Jack's attention. Causing the man to leave his own train of thought in favor of whatever insight Will could give them.

"What is it Will?" Jack began to walk over to Will, who was still trying to refocus himself. "Tell me what did you see?" Even though the question could be interpreted as a demand, the man's voice was not harsh. Jack could see the profiler was putting himself back together, so he wasn't going to push the man. He knew whenever Will crawled his way out of the mind of a killer and back into his own, he needed a cool down period in order to collect himself and Jack was going to give him that. Will swallowed the lump in his throat as he fought to come up with an explanation to what he had stumbled upon.

"Control." Was all Will could get out as he fought to break whatever barrier that tried to seal off his vocal cords. "The killer needs to be in control of all the situations she is put in, that's why she finds what these men are attracted too and uses it against them. Why she lulls them into a false sense of security. She need's control to function and whatever she is facing out of all," Will gestured to the display that was laid out in front of them. "Of this, made her feel as though she did not have it anymore. Something took that control from her, so she acted the only way she knew how to."

"By murdering another man." Jack said as his eyes flicked over to the body and back to Will, "is there anything else going on, beside the fact she felt like she no longer had control?"

"It's more than likely she was planning on killing this man," Will breathed out, "but she did not plan on killing him so soon. She believed she was pushed into to committing this act, as though it was the only way to get some semblance of control back into her life. This caused her to experience something beyond anger after killing this man, she was enraged. But not towards him, or herself. This rage was pointed towards someone else." Will answered as his eyes drifted down away from Jack.

“If she acted out and was scrambling for this feeling of control that you mention. This might mean it is more than likely this is the chance that she could have slipped.” Jack speculated out loud.

“Could be,” Will said, his eyes still looking down and away, “but it could also mean the complete opposite.”

“And what do you mean by that?” Jack asked as he crossed his arms and adjusted his stance, trying to capture some form of eye contact from the profiler. “In most cases when the killer has lost control, they tend to drastically slip up.”

Will nodded his head agreeing with the statement, because it was true. When a killer is faced with something that alters their routine when it comes to committing a crime there is a tendency for an error. But sometimes that wasn’t always the case, a frantic mind was an unpredictable mind.

“That might be the case for most, but with her it could be the complete opposite. She is looking for a way to regain the control she felt she had lost. Even though she felt such a strong impulse, does not mean she might have slipped up.”

“What are you saying Will?”

“All I am saying is that don’t expect for her to suddenly leave us with evidence that could lead to her capture. She might instead make it even more difficult than before.”

After saying that, Beverly stepped out of the closet, holding a small black leather wallet in her hand and an uncertain look on her face.

“This is odd,” She spoke, drawing the two’s attention. “You know how our killer never touches the wallet?” Will nodded his head, while Jack just waited for the investigator to continue. “Well this time she took this man’s license. We are officially dealing with our first John Doe.”

So, is this your way to regain control? Take the man’s id in order to make sure we can’t find a way back to you, or is there something about this man that will make it easier for us, instead. Will thought as he weighed the two options in his head and tried to estimate which one was closest to the truth.

“Well, she might have taken the wallet, but she did leave us this.” Jimmy said as he held up long strain of blood coated hair, that hung heavily between the tips of his tweezers.

“Looks as though our Black Window has finally missed stepped after all.” Jack commented, clear he wasn’t trying to hide the smugness in that sentence and something felt off to Will, but he couldn’t place the reason why.

The drive back to Quantico took longer than Will would have liked. Thanks to morning traffic and the shift in the weather, he couldn’t say he was all that surprised. It did give him time to be alone, time to think over the latest crime scene while it laid fresh in his thoughts. Where there was little to no distractions, no expectation to quickly blurt out a solution. Just

himself in his own space while he ran though explanation after explanation, for why the sudden change. Why she took the license, why she fought for some form of control, and why she decided to leave behind a strand of hair. Because Will was certain that this woman, this Black Widow would not have left a strand of hair behind. Not after three pristine crime scenes, that showed off how meticulous she could be.

But Jack had thought otherwise, so did the rest of the team. All falling into the belief that it was bound to happen at some point, that there was no such thing as a perfect crime and a part of Will believed that as well. Yet his mind still could not find peace with the practically gifted evidence.

If you took the time to take the license out of the wallet, then why were you so careless to leave behind a strand of hair? Here you wanted to make it harder for us, in order to gain that control that threaten the slip through your grasp. Yet you left behind a piece of evidence that will connect you to the crime, why is that? Will parked his car and just sat there, he could feel the weight of the morning baring down on him as he sat in the driver seat with the heater gently blowing on him, taking away the hard chill that tried to seep into his bones. Will pushed the weight to the side in favor of trying to keep himself focused. But the only thing he could focus on was, *why.* It made no sense, he felt like he was walking in a circle trying to figure this out, because all her actions contradict themselves and it was irksome. For this killer, who thought of almost everything, why the snag, why the overlooked piece of evidence. It was all so confusing. Could it just be a blatant sign of her rage filled act, lost in the hot blistering emotion, did she simply over look one aspect in favor of another, could it be that simple?

Will leaned back in his seat, took off his glasses, and pressed the heels of his hands to his eyes. Trying to ease the scattering thoughts that bounced around inside his skull. Letting out a deep frustrated laced sigh, feeling his chest decompress and his body tying to go lax. But it hardly helped, he still felt some sense of tenseness that gripped him and refused to let go. Will tried to get his mind into a more relaxed state, being wound tight often did not help him when it came to finding a solution. He refocused his mind on the sound of the rain that was starting to finally ease up, no longer did it pound heavily on the roof of his car, but instead made a light pittering sound. It helped ease the tight wires that pulled his mind in different directions, threating to draw and quarter himself until he was just pieces that refused to come back together. As he felt himself slowly getting lost in the light taps that came from the rain, his body dipping into the car seat and the light brush of the warm air that poured out of the heater, he could feel the sensation of drifting lick at his conscience. That was until his phone sang out to him for the second time that day, Will nearly jumped out of his skin thanks to the sudden ring tone, that he was slowly starting to grow tired of.

He let out a heavy sigh, feeling annoyed at the fact that once again being ripped away from the feeling of relaxation. It was as if the universe did not want him to have the feeling at all. As though it liked the idea of having him in a constant form of tension. Why feel at peace, when you can feel like at any moment something could just jump out at you. Will pulled his phone out of his coat, not even bothering to check who might be calling him.

“Graham.” Will answered with a flat voice, as he tried to hide that he was in no mood to talk to anyone at the moment.

“Good morning sweetheart.” Came the warm voice of Miranda, and for a split-second Will’s mind went blank. Out of all the possible people to call him out of nowhere, not once did he think of it being Miranda. The last time he actually had a phone call with her was Friday, after that all they did was exchange text messages. Simple text messages, that showed small bits of shared information between them, like when Miranda had let Will know that her flight went well, or simple good mornings and goodnights. Now and then they would sprinkle some information on how their day had gone, but there was nothing beyond that point. It was clear that both of them were trying to ignore the elephant that entered the room that Friday morning. Will did not bring it up and neither had Miranda, they both just communicated around it. To Will it felt like they were somewhat content with just the small spurts of texts that were exchanged back and forth during the four day’s that they were apart.

“Miranda, I wasn’t expecting a call.” Will confessed with a slight chuff of his breath as he shifted in his seat. Resting his arm on the door’s armrest and propping his head up.

Miranda let out a light laugh. “I know, all we’ve been doing is texting for the past couple of days, so this call must have come out as unexpected.”

“You can say that, why the sudden change?”

Miranda let out a small hum. “Well, I’ve completed most if not all what needs to be done during this business trip, leaving me with ungodly amount of free time that I cannot for the life of me handle,” There was a slight pause. “I’m not going to lie, but sitting here by myself. I find that I am facing that uncomfortable feeling of loneliness and let’s face it text messages don’t really fill in the air of silence.” Will understood where Miranda was coming from, though he did prefer text messaging over phone calls. It was more mechanical, less personal. He felt it was easier to put his thoughts into written format than verbal. Plus he could just quickly text out his reply and continue on with whatever task he had in hand at the moment. Easily splitting his attention, unlike verbal communication where all his attention was focused on the other person. Where with text all he had to focus on were words, with a person he had to focus on the tone of their voice, their facial features, and body language along with what they were saying. Sometimes it all felt too much for him, too much input not enough output. Yet he still understood where Miranda was coming from, sometimes it did feel nice to hear a voice over just reading someone’s thought and imagining their voice reading it out loud. Reminding you that there was an actual human being on the other side of the screen and not just a handful of digital lettering waiting for your reply.

“So you’re just calling me because you feel lonely?” Will asked with a small breath of a chuckle as he turned his head to look out the window. The view was distorted thanks to the water that slowly slid down the glass. One of the raindrops caught Will’s eyes and he lazily followed the drop’s descent as it cut through the rest of the droplets and gathered at the bottom of window with the rest of its fallen kind.

“Not entirely, I missed the sound of your voice,” Miranda replied, “plus with this call I can pretend that you are her sitting right next to me, legs stretched out one crossed over the other, just out of reach so are bodies cannot touch, but your presence making up for the pace. Both of us in a state of contentment as the clock ticks by. It helps fight off the loneliness you can say.” Miranda lightly laughed and Will heard her shift again, the sound of fabric being

brushed against itself. “Something a simple text conversation can’t allow me to imagine when I close my eyes.”

“I know what you mean,” Will breathed out as he leaned back into his car seat, letting his eyes slowly drift shut. Tapping into his over active imagination, using it for something other than the unforgiving world of death and putting it into a different lighter use. He found himself mimicking what Miranda was telling him as imagined her sitting in his passenger seat next him. One leg crossed over the other, her head turned towards him, with a soft smile playing at her lips. It was nice and Will found out Miranda was right; it did help fight off some aspect of loneliness he did not realize he was facing until she had surprised him with the call.

Before that Will felt fine with the simple text conversations they were having. They helped fight off any means of missing Miranda while she was away. He could suffice with the way they had communicated. Though he wouldn’t be lying to himself when he found himself longing to hold a conversation with her face to face. It made him feel like a teenager, going through their first time of being separated from their partner. Which had him realizing how ridiculous the feeling was and had him pushing that thought out of his mind. But now that he was on the phone with her, he could feel the adolescent feeling beginning to resurface all over again. “Texts don’t really fill up the vacant space like a voice can, it can try. But sound even though you can’t see it, can still take up space.”

“There you go again, showing off how creative you think.” Miranda commented and Will could hear the smile that must have been on her face, “another thing I noticed I missed.” She let out a sigh. “Guess I not only just miss your voice, but you in general.” Her voice was soft and it sounded as if she was revealing a deep secrete.

“Don’t think your feelings are one sided.” Will replied. It was a rare occurrence for Will to feel like he actually missed someone. Growing up on the constant move, he learned fast not to form strong attachments to anyone. What was the point if he was just going to end up leaving in a couple months, have everything packed up and ready to set sail once more. The first time it happened Will felt hurt, felt like the action was not fair for him or the few friends he had made, that he never had the chance to say goodbye to. Yes, he did cry when his dad had told him that they were to set off the next morning that night over dinner. There was no prior notice, giving him any time to prepare himself for the sudden move, anytime to say goodbye to his friends, or anytime to just adjust in general. He did not cry in front of his dad though, even though he was young Will knew that those tears would not stop the move. He did cry later that night after his dad tucked him into bed and exchanged their goodnights. When the lights were flicked off was when the tears slowly emerged in his eyes and slip down his cheeks into his pillow, silently as he processed what was going to happen the next morning. Wondering if he was going to be able to at least watch as the town they were docked in grow smaller and smaller as they sailed off, or if he was just going to wake up surrounded by the large body of water.

By their third move was when Will had learned to accept that, that was how it was going to be. He had learned to never grow comfortable in one place for too long, because at any moment he was expected to pack up and get ready to move again. Because there were always going to be better jobs for his dad to take just around the corner. After accepting that, Will

made sure to not form strong attachments to anyone, what was the point if as soon as he got home, he was just going to be told to prepare himself for the journey to the next port. Why risk opening himself up, just to be ripped apart at the end. It wasn't until his teenage years that his dad had slowed down and shown the signs of wanting to settle into one place. Finally deciding that the job he had landed at a ship yard working on boats, was a good enough gig to keep him grounded, but the damage of the moves had left their mark on Will.

"Maybe we should have tried making calls to one another sooner, that way we both could have fought off the loneliness together."

"I believe we both know why we stuck to just text messages," Will said, "our last phone call didn't end so well did it." Will sighed as he fought the need to rub his eyes. He did not want to bring up the argument, that was something the texting helped him avoid. It was just easer to dance round the issue with the quick standard replies, that came with that form of communication. But now that he was actually talking to Miranda, how could he not. It gnawed at the back of his mind, trying to burrow its way to the forefront of his attention.

Miranda let out a heavy sigh. "I know Will and it is something we desperately need to discuss with one another, but can we do it when we are together? That way it's face to face, more personal."

"I can agree with that." It was a simple request; a request Will was willing to accept. Relieved to finally be able to clear the air and get rid of the elephant. To start and work out what might have happened or might not have happened.

"Good," Miranda sounded so relieved by Will's acceptance that it almost hurt, "now, what have you've been up to these past couple days since I've been gone?" Miranda asked, easily changing the subject and Will was glad she did. Not wanting to linger too long on the heavy subject matter that they pushed to the side together.

"Nothing much just standard investigating mixed with teaching," Will sighed, "that was until this morning."

"Let me guess the Black Widow had struck again."

"Bingo, I just left the crime scene and made my way over to Quantico when you called." Will breathed out and once more felt the exhaustion settling into him, slowly coating his body, and weighing himself down even further than before. "I'll no doubt be here all day."

"Why do you say that?" Miranda asked, her voice laced with a slight hint of curiosity and Will could picture her head tilting to the side, her long black hair slowly sliding over one of her shoulders. If she were in the car with him, no doubt that she would have leaned over and rested her arm on the center consul and use it to prop her head up with.

"Because she stepped out of her standard M.O. and also might have slipped up for the first time." Will answered as he slowly began to fiddle with the hem of his jacket.

"What do you mean by that?"

“She took the man’s license, something she has never done before, my guess is because in the beginning she wanted us to know these men. So we knew who she was humiliating, a way to ensure it would continue for these men, even after she had left the scene. But now she purposely cut that part out of her process for some unusual reason.” Will answered finding it oddly easy to talk to Miranda about the case in full. The words slipped through his lips matching the air he breathed as it all exited his body, clearing his mind of the scattering feeling in the process.

“Sounds like she is trying to hide something to me and I don’t mean just this poor man’s identity,” Miranda hummed, “you also mentioned that she had slipped up?”

“Yeah,” Will’s pinched the bridge of his nose, “she had left a strand of hair at the crime scene.”

“Isn’t that a good thing, makes it easier to identify her or something on those lines.”

“You would think, yes now we have her DNA, but that’s about it unless she is in the system, which my guess is she isn’t, we are still at square one in some sense or another.” A yawn past Will’s lips. The case was becoming more and more tiring for him as the days passed by and he knew the feeling was only going to grow thanks to the sudden shift of behavior and sign of fault. Which made it all so tempting to just sit inside his car for as long as possible, prolonging the inevitable.

“You sound tired sweetheart.” Miranda observed, her voice was caring and warm. It felt nice to hear the soft sound and feel the emotion that flowed through the phone speaker. Will could almost feel the phantom touch of a gentle hand caressing the side of his face. How he wanted that touch to be real, so he could lean into it and soak in the sympathy. “Maybe you are working yourself a bit too much, perhaps you should take an extra day off.”

“I wish it could be that simple.” Will said as he slowly opened his eyes, noticing for the first time that the rain had finally came to a stop. How he wished it would continue, so he could listen to its soothing effects for a single moment longer. “But thanks to the reveal of a possible end point around the corner, Jack is going to be all hands-on deck from this point on.”

“Well, then maybe I should let you go. That way you won’t get into any trouble. Hate to have the boss find you sitting on the phone talking to your girlfriend all day.” She lightly chuckled near the end of the sentence, which had a smile forming on Will’s face.

“Sounds tempting to me.”

It had finally happened, after a few weeks since Will’s friendly warning, Jack had finally called Hannibal in to consult with the case. To lend the team some expertise in one form or another. Gifting him with an in person look on what this Black Widow was capable of first hand and not having to relay heavily from pictures, files, and word of mouth from Will. Though Will could easily paint the scene for Hannibal’s own imagination to latch onto, nothing could compare to an in person viewing. There was a section of himself that wished Jack had called him as soon as the body was discovered, instead of waiting so long into the day, that way he could receive an even fresher viewing. Along with the amusement he felt

when he watched as the investigating team scrambled around the crime scene like worker ants trying to find crumbs to bring back to the colony. It was always amusing to watch them scurry around eyes wide open, trying to take in all that could be and their minds stretched out racking over any form of clues. All trying to find something to bring back to their intrepid leader, that would feed his hunger. Just so he could give them enough slack on their leashes he tended to pull so hard on and give them room to breathe.

Hannibal walked leisurely down the hallway towards Jack's office, now and then giving a passer by a small nod of a greeting matched with a friendly smile. In his hands he carried two to-go cups of coffee, Hannibal had the foresight to stop at a local café to pick up something to help fight off the fatigue that he knew Will would be fighting that day. Being called so early in the morning several times, mixed with his own poor sleep schedule, and thrown into a crime scene where he was pushed to expand his mind. Contort himself to fit inside the killer's mindset would no doubt have pushed Will towards the cliff of exhaustion, where he struggled to balance himself on the crumbling edge. Even though Hannibal did find Will's sassy side amusing at times, that said sassy side did tend to turn towards a more disrespectful behavior when the younger man was fighting off exhaustion.

As he grew closer to the office where he would meet with the head strong agent and be briefed on what was going on and how his skills were needed. Before he was guided towards the lab where the rest of the Jack's team of misfits gathered, with their minds conjoined as they combed over the body and surprisingly new evidence that they had found. He was just a few doorways away, when something had caught his peripheral vision. One of the conference room's doors was completely open, which at most times Hannibal would not have paid a second's notice to the open room. But it was the occupant in the room that had caught his attention.

Hannibal stopped and turned towards the open door, to gain a better look at what the office held for him. Hannibal slowly walked over to the doorway and peered inside; the room was a neatly held cluster of controlled chaos. On the far end of the room was a corkboard that held several pictures of the past crime scene, the victims before they had met such a tasteless fate, and pages of notes mixed along with those pictures. Hannibal would have to enter the room, if he wanted to get a better look on what information those notes had to offer. He turned his attention away from the board and towards the long oval table that took up the center of the room, on the table was a smaller section of that controlled chaos that filled the room. Papers were strewn around the table, over lapping one another, it was clear who placed them there had a sort of filing system at play, but that system was hard to identify to anyone who wasn't the person who laid the papers out.

The doctor's eyes traveled through the chaotic puddle of papers; a mixture of notes, pictures, and other forms of information, and his eyes landed on the bringer of the skew mess. Who sat at the middle of the table; where most individuals might have decided to sit at either the head of the table or near corkboard. But this individual chose to sit at the center of the table, a subconscious effort to keep their attention on all important points in the room. Like the doorway and the corkboard, if they had chosen to sit anywhere else those lines of view would have been obscured one way or another.

Hannibal easily drank in the sight of Will. His body was softly slumped over the table, one of his arms acted as an impromptu pillow while the other was loosely bent in front of him. His controlled chaos of papers surrounded him like a barrier, while he drifted in the realm of sleep. Hannibal turned his attention to Will' s face and how soft it presented itself, his full lips slightly parted as small huffs of air played at a few of the papers that were near him. How his dark bangs barely played at his closed eyelids, Hannibal caught how Will's eyes slightly flickered under those shut lids.

It seems that you are more comfortable surrounded by the world of death then you like to believe Will, Hannibal thought as he carefully stepped fully into the conference room. Making sure not to disturb the other. Even though every inch of him wanted to reach out and touch the other, to trace those soft enticing features with the tips of his fingers and commit the feeling of the other's skin to memory. He held himself back. *Where most would think of it as abhorrent to be able to fall so deep into the land of slumber while the horror of these acts incircle them. You have managed to succumb to it and find rest among the wicked.* Hannibal approached the table as he continued to take in the sight as he grew closer, Will was open and at peace, a sight that the agent hardly let anyone witness before and right at that moment he was presenting himself for only Hannibal to lay his eyes on.

He found it harder and harder to resist the temptation that played at his mind the closer he walked over to the table. No longer able to hold back the possessive animal that paced back and forth within him that whined for him to act on impulse. Hannibal quietly set down on of the cups and slowly reached out, acting as though he was reaching out to a skittish animal. His mind and body on alert, at any moment Will could show signs of stirring and he would have to quickly retreat. But all that went slightly away when his fingertips brushed the first strand of curls. They were much softer than Hannibal would have thought, he always imagined Will's hair being coarser, but then when he had witness them in a tamed state those few Fridays ago, he really should have not been that surprised.

Hannibal lightly trailed his fingers through the waves of curls, neatly kept nails barely brushing over Will's scalp. Memorized as he watched as the wild curls slightly bent under the weight of his touch before springing back to life. *I wonder what possible dreams you must be experiencing while in here. Are they the same nightmares that plague you while in the safety of your home, or are they something more forgiving? If it's the lesser that must be so confusing for you, while you are here in this building, where they keep the dead victims, you mascara as their slayer as they lay in the same facility. While you surround yourself in memoirs of where they had drawn their last breath. It must all be so confusing for you my dear Will.*

Though Hannibal knew he could lose himself for hours with what he was doing, he also knew that was an impossible task. At some point someone would surely come looking for him and stumble across them, disturbing them both in two distinctly different ways. So instead of having that be a problem, Hannibal decided that it would be himself to break the moment. By slowly straightening himself out, grabbing the cup of coffee, retreating back to the doorway, and angling his body just to the side of the entrance. Making sure he came off as though he was just walking by when he spotted the open doorway and he lightly knocked on door. At first the other did not stir in the slightest, the light knocking did nothing to break through. Hannibal, should have known the light knock would hold no strength, Will

practically sang that he was experiencing the REM stage of sleep towards the other. With that, Hannibal gave another harder knock on the door and to his pleasure, that seemed to do the trick.

Will stirred for a few seconds, before taking in a deep breath and slowly sat up. His arms felt stiff from staying in one place for so long, as he reached up to rub the sleep off of his face. *God, how long was I out?* He thought to himself as stopped rubbing his face and let his arms fall to the side, as he began to refocus himself. He turned his head to gather in his surrounding, as he fought off the haze that drifted throughout his mind. Will blinked heavily, his vision as blurry as how his mind felt from being dragged out of the void of slumber for the second time that day. Realizing what had awoken him, Will quickly turned his attention to the door. *Please don't be Jack, please don't be…* "Hannibal?"

"Hello Will," Hannibal greeted as he leisurely walked into the office as if it was for the first time. "Sorry to have disturbed you."

Will shook his head, ignoring how stiff his neck felt with each little twist of muscles. "It's fine, I'd rather it be you than Jack to be completely honest."

"Yes, I suppose he would not be pleased to see you sleeping on the job." Hannibal commented, there was a slight note of dry humor in that sentence, that did not need a response. "By the way I picked you up something on the way over here." Hannibal held out the cup for the other to take, intentionally making it an odd distance that would cause Will to have to stand up to receive the offering. "To help fight off the mid-day fatigue you no doubt must be feeling."

"Thanks," Will replied as he leaned over the table, having to stand slightly and took the offering, before sitting down again, "you're a real, life saver." Will added as he raised the cup to his lips.

"So I've been told." Hannibal replied with a pleased expression that Will could not place where it was pointed towards. Either with the humor placed around the sentence or with the fact that the man could call himself a life saver. He guessed it was a mixture of the two and with that it had Will realizing that he once again managed to stroke the others ego.

"Maybe you should print it on your business card, that way others know." Will dryly commented.

"That would just make the card appear far too clutter in my opinion." Hannibal replied as he took a drink from his cup while he made his way over to the corkboard and Will just fondly rolled his eyes at the comment, before mirroring the action of finally taking a drink. Where he was met with a semi sweet richness of chocolate that was pared with the full body bitterness of espresso. The two flavors danced along his tongue in a rhythm of bitter and sweetness that collided together in a smooth finish. It was an old familiar taste that Will hadn't returned to for a while and it greeted his tastebuds like an old friend.

"You bought me a caffé mocha." Will simply stated, a bit perplexed at the drink of choice. More expecting something dark with a hint of sugar added to it, something akin to what Hannibal would no doubt be drinking.

Hannibal turned to look over his shoulder eyebrow slightly raised, “Yes, I hope you don’t mind,” he said as he turned around fully to face Will. “If I recall correctly, you once said that you sometimes like to purchase the drink as a sort of treat for yourself.” Hannibal recalled with a small stretch of a smile, as if he was proud of himself for remembering such a small detail that Will couldn’t recall ever stating out loud to anyone. But it felt almost nice that the other had remembered something he must have said in passing. It also had that unknown flicker stirring in his chest and Will had to push that unknown feeling aside. He had no room in his mind to be questioning why his body was sending himself signals he could not place.

“I’m surprised you remembered such a minuscule fact,” Will said just the corner of his mouth rising in a half-made smile before he took another small sip of the semi missed drink. “But thanks again.” He added and Hannibal bowed his head slightly in a ‘you’re welcome’ gesture, before turning back to the corkboard.

“I see this is where you have been keeping track of what information you can gather from the Black Widow’s victims.” Hannibal stated as his eyes traveled over the strung-up cluster of papers, receiving a better look on what some of those notes were. One of those papers were just list of female names categorized in alphabetical order, some were crossed out while others had sort hand notes next to the names. Like age range and hair color that might be a match to the Black Widow, “I also see that these are some names from the infamous list of past lovers that Jack has you studying over.” He slightly lifted one of the papers and let it go so it would fall back against the board.

“Yeah, that it is,” Will sighed as he stood up from the table and walked over to stand by the doctor, “and honestly I have strong doubt that our killer is even on this list.” Hannibal turned his head to look over at Will

“And why do you believe that Will, wouldn’t this theory of past lovers match with two aspects of the profile you have produced. Aligning with the jealousy that you believe she felt and it would explain how she was able to seduce these men so easily if she had already done it before.”

Will ran a hand over his face, before running it through his hair as he tried to gather his reasoning into something coherent. “Yes, it could easily align with all those elements, but something feels off,” Will stated, “like it should fit together it shows the signs of wanting to, but something is not letting it be and I don’t know what it is. I can feel it there on the forefront of my mind, yet something is draped over it so I can’t see it clearly. It’s waiting for this one moment of clarity before it will all come together.” He answered as his eyes jumped from one piece of information to the other.

“Perhaps we should go see what the other’s have to offer and that might bring you that moment of clarity that you are seeking.” Hannibal offered and Will just nodded his head, it was hard to tell if the offer had sunken into Will’s mind or if he was just responding automatically without any thought.

“Alright let’s do that then.” Will answered as he took a drink and quickly turned away from the corkboard as if it offended him to look at, putting Hannibal’s suspicion to rest.

Hannibal leaned over the recent dead body of the John Doe that was discovered earlier that day in a nearly falling apart motel. Cleaned of the dark crimson that had coated his wounds and skin appearing a shade of grey under the strong lights of the lab. Under the scent of slowly approaching decay, staining nicotine, and lab housing chemicals, something playfully lingered on the man's skin. It was heavy with a full body, yet at the same time subtle, ment to be applied in small dosage. A smokey scent that had one's mind picturing a romantic fire lit diner for two paired with a hint of a something sweet, perhaps vanilla. It was warm with a crisp trail; it would easily draw someone's attention once the fragrant hit their nose. The scent did not belong to the man, it was a leftover reminder of the killer, something she could not dispose of like she tended to do with the rest of the evidence that would point towards her identity.

Seeing the corps from the case in person and had him thinking what it would have been like to stumble upon the body in mist of the killer's intended design. Exposed for judgmental minds to look upon and cast their negative thoughts on the body. He recalled Will mentioning experiencing a strong feeling of rage that had washed over him when he had entered the crime scene that morning along with the loss of control she felt. It had Hannibal wondering what outside interference caused such a range of emotions, after being labeled of only feeling two. It had Hannibal smiling internally as he imagen this Black Widow who was being held up on a metaphorical pedestal, for her ability to clean a crime scene and vanish like vapor to suddenly show signs of imperfection.

His eyes traveled over the angry cut that gouged across the body's throat and Beverly was correct it was not a simple slice that a simple blade could bring. This was jagged and whatever weapon the killer chose to use struggled against the skin. Most people often misunderstood that the flesh could not be penetrated easily. Like how media would portray it, it took a great deal of pressure to puncture the skin; the layers that were often forgotten about, played as a protection barrier. Even though this weapon that was used no doubt had a sharp point, it was not made to slice. Hannibal could almost appreciate the usage of an unconventional murder weapon, showing that this woman might be a bit more creative than he intentionally thought when he scanned over the pictures that Will had brought to him during one of their sessions.

"Might you have a list of possible weapons that could have been used to commit this act" Hannibal asked as he straightened himself and casted a look over to the three scientists, who had stood near one of the counters.

"Well." Jack nearly barked, when neither one of the three answered the question as quickly as he would have liked. Causing two of the three to jump slightly and it even had caused Will to flinch, making him regret standing next to the bull of a man. Will unnoticeably made his way away from the other to stand next to an empty examination table, putting a much-needed distance from the group. To either calm his suddenly strike nerves or to help his mind continue whatever path it might be taking looking for more answers.

"Yeah," Beverly said, her voice cool and composed as always, as she turned towards the counter and picked up a clipboard. "Here you go," she handed over the clipboard to Hannibal, who began to go over the list of possible tools used to take the man's life. "So far I was able to eliminate all standard hand-held garden tools that had a double blade," Beverly

crossed her arms, “I was working my way towards more common house hold appliances.” She added as her eyes flickered down towards the list then over at Jack, as if mentally saying how she was making progress on the task.

Jack simply rolled off the negative stare as if it was never sent his way and turned his attention over to Hannibal, who was scrolling over the list and glancing back over towards the body. He leaned in to look closely to where the flesh was first penetrated, before it was dragged over the man’s throat severing the jugular.

“Do you have any ideas, Doctor?” Jack simply asked as he turned fully toward the other.

“I might,” Hannibal stated as he stood straight placing a finger to his chin as he continued to study the wound, the agents could see the gears turning in the man’s head as he flipped through his own mental list of possible weapons. “I recall a case of domestic violence; a woman had attacked her spouse with a pair of scissors, slicing the man’s forearm when he tried to protect himself. Though the aftermath wasn’t as deep as the one that took this man’s life, it did leave a similar wound.” Hannibal finished as he looked away from the victim and around towards the other agents.

“What are you saying, that this woman managed to cause all this with a simple pair of house scissors?” Zeller asked as he gestured towards the dead body, clear he was skeptical towards the identity of the weapon of choice.

“I mean it could be possible,” Jimmy spoke, “have you seen some of the scissors that are out there, not all of them are made to just cut paper. Kitchen scissors alone have been known to accidently cut off a finger when misused.”

That’s not the only thing that a simple pair of kitchen scissors can cut Zeller, should you witness what else they can sever when placed in a skilled set of hands, you’d be singing a different tune. Hannibal mussed to himself as he set down clipboard. Looking over towards Will, who looked so lost in thought that it would take an expert cartographer to help the man navigate his way back to them. *Now what interesting insight might be running through your head, or are you still tapped upstairs in that conference room I found you in. Trying to cram those poorly fitting puzzles pieces back together, so you can present it to Uncle Jack and walk away with a semi satisfied mindset.*

“We now have a possible murder weapon.” Jack spoke drawing Hannibal’s attention away from Will, “What about the hair found at the crime scene, what are the leads on that?”

“Not good,” Beverly said with a sigh as she walked over to the computer and with a few expertise key strokes. Pulled up a close picture of the root of the strand of hair and information it had revealed. “Like I feared, whoever this woman is she is not in the data base. All we have is confirmation that she is a woman, the hair did come from her head, and she was as straight as they came. No traces of any drugs where in her system.” She informed as she turned away from the computer screen.

“What about our John Doe, was he in the system?” Jack asked.

“Sorry Jack, he wasn’t in the system either.” Beverly answered with a subtle shake of her head and lift of her shoulders.

“So were basically back to square one when it comes to looking for her identity and we still have to figure out who this guy is.” Zeller commented, “Great.” He murmured to himself as he began to walk away before abruptly turning around. “Are we still certain the reason she is even targeting these men is because she some crazy ex?” He asked speculation leaking into the question. “I mean how do we not know she’s just spotting these men at one of their crazy parties like she did with Moore and just going from there.”

“Because what she is doing has to take time,” Beverly countered, “she obviously knows what they like in a woman and plays it against them.” Zeller let out a huff and crossed his arms.

“Okay, so that rules out it just being a first meetings, but that doesn’t rule out that she could possible not be an old ex looking for revenge.” He countered.

“He has a point, maybe we should just turn attention away from it for a while, Will hasn’t found anything so far, it could be a hindrance to the case progression.” Jimmy added.

“You’re right.” Came Will’s voice, drawing everyone’s attention. It was as if they all had forgotten that he was in the room in the first place. His standoff behavior and quiet demeanor helped him to blend into the back ground.

“What?” Jimmy asked a bit confused and searching for clarity, as he turned to look over towards the special agent. Who was facing them, but his eyes pointed towards the ground and his arms loosely crossed over his midsection.

“You’re right, the list has been nothing but a hindrance so far, when we could be looking into other sources instead of leaning on just this one.” Will clarified.

“But weren’t you the one who brought up the idea that we should be looking up a past lover?” Zeller asked, fighting a smug look as he adjusted his stance, clear he wasn’t completely satisfied with the idea of being proven right and wanting a bit more to feed his ego with.

“And weren’t you the one who thought she was hooker?” Beverly pointed out, clear that she could see what the other was trying to do and not going to let it happen. Knocking Zeller down a peg, before he broke through the ceiling.

“The list stays until I say otherwise.” Jack interrupted it was clear he was in no mood to be subjugated to the scrabble threatening to take place. “May I look at the pictures of the latest

crime scene perhaps there is something there that might help build the profile, that still seems a bit weary.” Hannibal offered, all though it be far too amusing to watch Jack’s team turn on each other. He could easily see it going in a circle with no possible satisfying end in sight. It was only a few seconds before he was handed printed copies of the crime scene and it was an exact copy of the last three. The body display, the location, and the only thing that

differentiated was the word. “Well, that is a crud word to have carved into the wall.” Hannibal stated as he came across the slur that scarred the motel’s wall.

“That’s what we all thought when we all first spotted it.” Jimmy had commented, before he went to busy himself. Walking passed Will, and the close movement helped the other keep his mind in the present and not threating to sink back into his own thoughts. His eye flickered around the group of people hopping from one to the other before steading themselves on to Hannibal, watching as the man looked over the picture that held the topic of the small conversation. He took in the way the other man stared down at the photograph, even though he tried to hide his reaction from the others, Will could see some of that feeling slowly leak passed the mask. The way his eyes slightly squinted in irritation and how the top right half of his lip subtly twitched upward, fighting a small snarl no doubt. Will wasn’t all that surprised to see a reaction subtly pouring out of the well pressed man. The word had an effect on any person who heard it, why would Hannibal be any different. But it was what emotion that was subtly showing itself across the other’s features that had Will thinking. An emotion that they all felt when they first laid their eyes on it, that was passed the first initial shock and laid passed the sometimes brought forth anger. An emotion that some felt whenever they heard the word be spoken by those in a crud tone. The emotion was *disgust.*

A key emotion that had traveled casually through each of the crime scenes. That had been acknowledged on more than one occasion, only to pushed aside just like the first crime scene. Only brought to the surface as soon as another body hit the autopsy room, innocent blood being spilled to draw attention back to it. It had risen to the surface only to slowly sink back down when it was not given enough attention and once it had risen again, it held all of Will’s focus just as it deserved in the first place.

Will’s eyes traveled back to the body, but he did not see just the John Doe, he was picturing the rest of the men that were caught in the Black Widow’s web. Will closed his eyes to focus on the four dead men that still held a slot in his mind as he weighed through the possible emotions that the woman must have felt while in all four of their presence. Yes, there was anger, the one emotion the Will had first turned his mind away from because he felt as though it was too obvious. Now, he had embraced the fact, especially after feeling the hot sting of rage that had flooded the motel room earlier. Then there was what he thought was jealousy, the emotion that he was sure was a link, it had appeared to him early on in the case. Will still held his doubts on it, only relying on it as a means to the end. It was a weak link in the chain of the case and he knew he had to sever it. If he went back to Hannibal’s comment on emotions feeding off of one another, which had Will noting how disgust easily fed the feeling of anger and vice versa.

Will opened his eye, stood straight and quickly left the room, everyone just watched as the profiler just left without warning. It was clear that it was a habit of the man, so no one was all that surprised when he left them without saying a word. Will could feel the puzzle trying to gather itself as he dropped one more piece and discarded another. But it would only do so if he could go back and look at all the key points. He needed to go look back at his notes, to go see the rest of the men, and see if he could lead himself to the answer that was right around the corner. The only two that followed after Will, was Jack and Hannibal, both wondering what might be racing though the man’s mind as he briskly walked back to the conference room that held all the notes that would navigate the team out of the Black Widow’s web.

“What are you thinking about Will?” Jack asked as he was the first to enter the room after the special agent, with Hannibal the last to follow in. Watching as Will approached the table, where his chaotic structure was left behind.

“Our killer was never a vengeful ex,” Will stated as he began to go through the pieces of papers that littered the table, looking over observations of these men’s behavior made by outsiders and those they held close. “There was no possible way for her to be when she felt so disgusted by these men. To even think about being in a relationship with them for a long period of time would just be revolting to her.” He answered as he set down the papers and turned back to the board.

“But you said she knew things about these men, personal facts that had these men basically feeding off of her.” Jack pointed out as he tried to keep up with Will’s barreling train of thought.

“One does not have to be in an intimate relationship to gain sacred information from another person,” Hannibal spoke, recalling what Will had told him over their shared dinner. “One can easily gain information from a friend, or a college. Sometimes even from a second-hand source.”

“Exactly,” Will said as he began to tear off the list of past lovers from the board. A part of him felt a sliver of satisfaction to finally be able to get rid of it. To no longer have it taken up space in his thoughts, with each tear of the paper he could feel his mind become clear, as the clutter was finally thrown away. “I only thought it could be an ex-lover because I thought she felt jealousy towards these men, or perhaps the woman that were lured in by their status, but she doesn’t she never did. No, she felt anger and disgust. With how these men gained their social status while she probably had to work for hers. Their wealthy life was practically handed to them and they acted like pigs thanks to it.”

“But if she’s not an old flame then what connects these men and how could she have known what they like to be able to work it in her favor?” Jack walked over to the board and took in the empty spaces left behind by Will’s removal. They created holes in the case that needed to be filled and he could not see the material that would soon be doing so.

“Like stated earlier, we need to look into another means of connections, these men must share something else in common besides the obvious wealth and social status. We need to forget looking into past lovers, and focus on other aspects of themselves. Whoever she is she had to have met them more than once.” Will said as he finally stood still, the electric air that had followed him into the office finally subsiding.

“That’s too broad, you need to be narrower about this Will. At least with the vengeful lover aspect we had something to go off on. Not with this new train of thought, you just removed a possible key appoint.” Jack pointed out and Will just subtly bobbed his head, understanding what Jack was getting at and partially agreeing with it. He was supposed to help close the case not rip it back open and though Jack might feel that’s what he was doing by eliminating the possibility of a lead, Will felt otherwise.

“I understand what you mean Jack, but what I’m thinking is if we turn attention away from that and towards something else, we will have better luck identifying her. Perhaps these men

all went to the same bank, or maybe went to the same social club." Will offered, his arm wrapped around his chest, it was clear that his train of thought was losing momentum and showed signs of slowing down.

"So what are we supposed to see, if these four men, one we still don't know the identity of, possibly all went to the same book club?" There was an undertone of frustration in Jack's question and Will knew better than to answer it fully. Instead he opted to stare at the board and try to gather himself, he could see the puzzle come together. He was on the right track, this new line of thinking was going to lead to an answer, Jack just needed to believe him.

"Perhaps that line of thought shouldn't be so drastic," Hannibal spoke adverting Jack's attention from Will and over to him. His more even tone attitude easily fought against Jack's fire, working against the opposite, and rising to the challenge. "Perhaps these men never crossed paths and simply frequented the same stores. They all seem to have similar taste in luxury items and spent their money in near identical ways, there is a possibility they all went to the same location to do so."

Will felt Jack's anger slowly begin to cool as he finally was able to catch onto what Will was trying to put into words. For some reason Hannibal was able to get it through to the other, better than he could and Will wished he knew why. There was a small section of himself that wanted to feel agitated towards that, but a greater part was just glad that Jack was able to understand where he was going.

"I would look into places that have to deal with frequent in person meetings," Will finally spoke, feeling the raging waters finally settle enough for him to step in without the fear of being pulled under. "Ones that rely heavily on interaction, where it's their job to come off as friendly and interested in these men's lives. To the point it has these men peacocking themselves to her without realizing it."

Jack slowly nodded his head in understanding, "Alright I'll have someone go through these men's banking history more closely and see what places appear for all three of them. But what about our John Doe, do you have any idea why she felt it was so important for us to not know his identity?"

"She most likely took it, because she wanted to feel like she could regain some form of control." Will simply stated, with a lose shrug. "After her hand was forced, she had to find a way to stable herself, taking the man's license and rendering us blind to who he could be was her way of doing so."

There was a knock at the office door and the three men turned to see who it could be. To be greeted by Beverly leaning into the doorway with a playful smile.

"Hate to interrupt," she said, even though her tone and smile said otherwise, causing Will to wonder what could possibly be causing such a smile, before those gleaming eyes locked on Will. "But someone is here to see you Will." Beverly revealed, her smile grew until it reached her eyes before quickly ducking away, before anyone could say anything. Will stared at the doorway, a bit puzzled at the statement. Wonder who might be stopping by to see him. Not noticing how the other two both shared their own look of puzzlement. Before either Hannibal

or Jack could say anything to the special agent, Will started to walk out the door. Once again causing the two to follow after him.

“Do you might know who this visitor could be Will?” Jack asked as he easily caught up to Will.

“I can’t really say.” Was all Will could answer as he continued to wonder who this person might be and why Beverly had left it open. Why couldn’t she just say who it was and why did she leave all three of them questioning this person’s identity. Then only one person came into his mind, but then it couldn’t be her. She was on the other side of country at the moment, dealing with her own world of boredom as her reason for the business trip trinkled by leaving her with an abundance of pent-up energy with no way of ridding herself of it. So, the unknown visitor being her was unlikely.

Yet the universe seemed to enjoy proving Will wrong. Because as soon as he turned the corner, he was gifted with the sight of Beverly enjoying a light hearted conversation with the one person who was supposably in California and wouldn’t be back until the following day.

“Maranda?”

Chapter End Notes

I just like the idea of Will just dropping knowledge bombs when ever he can. Reminding people that there is more than just one side of himself. Plus I really enjoy writing his and Beverly's interactions always have and always will.
Just a heads up next chapter might take a bit longer, I'll be away on vacation for a bit, doesn't mean I won't be writing, it means I won't have internet access and can't post in a decent time frame. So just a heads up to all you lovely readers :)

Rotten Olive Branch

Chapter Summary

> All Miranda wants to do is repair whatever damage that might have happened and hopefully move forward, so there are no hard feelings. But then again when is anything that simple.

Chapter Notes

> Guess who is finally back from vacation!!! Learned something while a way and that is that word does not do well with out internet as one might think. Turns out it'll let you open the document only once, then it's a no go after words. Who knew, not me of course, good thing the town I was in had a library for me to disappear to hahaha.
> Also this fic has now passed 200 pages holy crap, I'm still in disbelief !
> Hope you all enjoy the chapter and once again thank you all for the lovely comments and the kudos they mean a lot to me :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

By the sound of his voice, Miranda turned away from Beverly, her black hair flowering out in the spin and her lightly painted lips stretched in a warm smile, that reached her eyes. In those eyes, Will could see a glimmer of joy that was ment only for him. Neither one noticing as Beverly, who held her own smirk, pulled out her phone and quickly began to type out a message.

“Hello sweetheart.” Miranda greeted, as she quickly filled the distance between the two in a formal brisk walk. Before Will could verbalize his confusion towards her unexpected presence, that had his brain trying to connect to an answer. Miranda placed her hands on his chest; Will wondered if she could feel how heavy his heart beat thanks to her, and leaned in to press a greetings kiss to his lips. When their lips connected, Will felt that missed warm blossom in his chest begin to spread its petals, the feeling was slow and unwinding, the flower used to that hibernated state that it fell into ever since the separation. And he felt those thawed out petals slowly spread throughout his rib cage. Taking over every fried nerve that sparked like a faulty wire, coating the ends, and sealing off the hazard. Putting his mind at semi ease as he felt his eyes flutter shut, almost imitating their first kiss they had shared all those long nights ago.

The soft inviting feeling of Miranda’s lips on his own and how she slowly dropped her hands from his chest and wrapped her arms delicately around his torso. Will didn’t hesitate to mirror the action as his arms lifted from his side and wrapped around her form, pulling her in,

transforming their odd press of bodies into a tight hug. He slowly took in all of her as he pulled her close to himself. The warmth that rolled off of her soft body, the way her heart thumped lightly against his chest calling out to his and his answering back in its own steady rhythm. He could catch the distinct smell of rain slowly wafting off her that mixed lightly with her own perfume. That smelled of roasted cinnamon and heated citrus, that reminded someone of the end of fall and beginning of winter. Where the leaves of tress that use to resembled that of lit matches with their mix of yellows, oranges, and reds, slowly began to fade away with its falling leaves that lay forgotten on the ground. Ready for a passerby to step on them and hope for a satisfying crunch under their shoe. Will could feel the emotion of longing transfer off of Miranda and slowly soak into his own. Having it grow larger than what he originally thought it was.

Will was the first to break away, though every inch of him wished to just feed off the feeling of their connection for only a few moments longer, but he knew better than to indulged that greed for even a moment longer. Because he still had a rolling question on his mind as he stood with Miranda pressed close to him bring life to that dormant warmth that he forgot how good it felt to have flutter airily through his chest and body. Extinguishing that numbingly coldness that he managed to ignore for the past couple of days, thanks to the separation and blowing wound that had inflicted them both. Will pulled away, but did not let ago and was immediately trapped in the pool of warmth that were Miranda's eyes. He felt the joy that filled those eyes reach out to caress him as well and he let that feeling trickle into him. To the point he did not realize the smile that slowly etched itself on to his face.

"Miranda what are you doing here?" He finally was able to ask, the initial shock now subsiding and becoming less blaring. Transforming into something more constructive, that did not have his mind spinning in a never-ending circle as he captured all of her with his eyes. "I thought you'd be in California until tomorrow."

Miranda smiled and scrunched her shoulders up playfully, joy turning into giddiness. "I know, but my business venture ended early, I was able to get an early flight and I was initially going to surprise you later tonight," Miranda answered with a smile as she walked her fingers up his chest in a flirtatious manner, "but after our morning phone call," her hand lightly caressed the side of his face and it was much warmer than the phantom touch he had imagined in his car when they were on the phone together. Will felt himself subconsciously lean into that light embrace. "I realized I couldn't wait that long and I just missed you far too much." She finished her voice a gentle touch above a whisper as she placed another velvet kiss to his lips, sealing in how much she missed him, almost as if she was trying to prove a point.

Another moment teased to be born between the two, before someone cleared their throat. Intentionally breaking whatever might have emerged between the couple and reminding the two that they were in the company of others.

"Oh, right sorry." Will fumbled as the two broke slightly away from each other. Will's arm snaking around Miranda's back and laying claim to the curve of her waist, keeping her close to his side. While her outer arm crossed over herself and placed an equal claim onto his chest. Evidential that they still wanted to be close to one another, but open to the rest of those who filled in the space around them. "Miranda I'd like to introduce you to my…" Will blanked on

what to address them as, they all held different titles in his mind and he knew the right word to say would be colleges, but that was a rocky title at the start. Because that would imply that he worked with them almost on a daily bases and he really did not do that. He only worked with them when he was pulled out of his classroom and thrown into the field and he had to face it, the only one who actually held the title of friend was Beverly. The rest he felt more aligned with the word acquaintance at the moment.

But luckily his confusion to what his next word should be, could be interpreted as confusion pointed towards watching Zeller and Jimmy briskly approach the group. Before that brisk walked was unsubtly disguised as a casual stroll as they came near. Will's eyes left the two and moved over to Beverly, who tried to hide the smirk behind her hand and a fake cough as she noticed Will's deadpan look.

"Hey, what can I say, it's not every day that Will Graham's girlfriend decides to stop by the office," Beverly smiled as she walked over to them, "besides you know how I love to prove Zeller wrong." She added, before turning towards Miranda. "I'm Beverly by the way." She smiled brightly as she offered her hand for Miranda.

"Oh so you're the lovely Beverly that Will likes to mention," Miranda smiled as she took the other's hand and Beverly quirked her eyebrow and gave Will an amused look that had Will fighting the urge to turn away. "I must thank you for the dinner reservation at Strelitzia, it was an absolutely wonderful experience."

"I'm glad you two had such a good time and there is no need to thank me, Will already repaid his debt for that night." Beverly smiled as the two let go of each other's hand and another much more obvious throat clear broke through the end of the exchanged that had Beverly rolling her eyes and letting out an exaggerated sigh. "Let me introduce you the rest of the team," she said as she turned to the other two. "These two are."

"Hello, I'm Brian Zeller and it is a pleasure to meet you." Zeller said with enough over played charm it would have a fairy tale prince scoffing. As he reached over and shook Miranda's hand, Will was somewhat surprised that the agent just shook her hand and didn't opt to kiss the top of it. "But everyone calls me Zeller." He added with a charmed filled smile as he leaned away.

"And I'm Jimmy Price," Jimmy introduced with a more friendly manner and less of an overflowing charmed filled one, "and it doesn't matter what you call me." He added after the hand shake, only then realizing how odd it sounded.

"Well it's a pleasure to meet you both." Miranda smiled at the scientists. Her smile pleasant and unfaulty as she shared an equal greeting between the two.

"Just out of curiosity," Zeller stepped forward, reinstating himself back into Miranda's attention. "Just how long have you two been an actual couple because when I first heard I honestly thought," Zeller's chuckle turned to an *ow* when Beverly elbowed him in the ribs. "Hey what was that for I was just."

"Being rude, yeah I noticed." Beverly cut off as she crossed her arms and narrowed her eyes. "I'm sorry about him, he spends so much time with corps' he forgets how to act around the

land of the living."

Miranda let out a light warm chuckle, clear that the little outburst had no negative effect on her.

"It's completely alright," She smiled, paired with a dismissive motion with her hand. "But to answer your question. Will and I have been a couple for about two maybe three months," She turned to look over at Will. "Is that correct sweetheart?" She asked with a slight tilt of her head. Will's eyes lightly flickered around Miranda's face as he took in her question.

Has it really been that long? He asked himself, running through all the time they had spent with one another. Calculating the times and dates between every date they had, every time they texted, or called. It all felt so short to him, from the first time they had met and to the point of them standing together in each other's arms. It felt so short, but at the same time it felt so long. He recalled meeting Miranda just when the drag of fall was arriving and now it was showing signs of leaving, welcoming the cold hard touch of winter to take its place. *It feels as though like we just had our first date just a few days ago, yet it felt like months has passed at the same time.*

"Yeah, must have been a few months at the least. Probably leaning towards three I have to say." Will finally was able to answer with a short nod of an agreement and Miranda gave him a warm smile towards the answer.

"Wow a whole three months." Zeller said with over played exaggeration that pulled through the sentence that was paired with a nod of approval. Beverly sent him another glare and this time the man had the foresight to step out of her range. Going to stand by Jimmy, who just sent him an unamused look. Will had to fight from rolling his eyes and letting out a frustrated sigh, as he recalled the amount of times Beverly brought up the man's initial reaction to finding about his newly formed relationship.

"And this Miranda is," Will turned and guided Miranda to face Jack, quick to change the topic and direction of everyone's focus.

"Jack Crawford." Jack smiled as he reached out and took Miranda's hand in a more well-maintained friendly gentlemen manner. Much more polished than what Zeller tried to accomplish.

"Oh right, you must be the head of the Behavioral Unit Will works with," Miranda lit up as they shook hands, "Will's mentioned you a few times as well."

"Well I hope he hasn't been saying anything bad about his experience with our little group." Jack chuckled warmly as they parted, he placed his hands in his pants pockets, while Miranda returned her hand to rest on Will's chest. Now Will hoped she couldn't feel the heavy heartbeat that hammered behind her touch. He thought he had recovered from Miranda meeting Lecter for the first time and now she was meeting the rest of world he sometimes called home. Two worlds of his colliding all over again in front of his eyes and he had no coverage from the collision.

“No need to worry about that,” Miranda lightly laughed, before she tilted her head slightly, her eyes somewhat narrow, clear there was a question on her mind before she spoke it. “Hold on did you say your last name was Crawford, you wouldn’t happen to know a Phyllis Crawford by any chance would you?” She asked and it was clear she piqued some interest from everyone in the group.

“Why yes that’s my wife, why do you ask?”

“Well, let’s just say I hardly forget a client and Phyllis is such a valuable member of mine.” Miranda smiled and Jack tilted his head and crossed his arms, a switch had taken place. From amusement to intrigue, it happened in a microsecond. But the issue with the senior agent’s intrigue was that it often left the door open for more raw emotions to shuffle through and those raw emotions were never tame.

“I don’t quite understand what you mean by that Miss…”

“Oh my apologies,” Miranda ducked her head slightly, before raising it and meeting Jack’s eyes, “Rhettford, Miranda Rhettford and I didn’t mean to come off in any negative or anonymous way Mister Crawford.” Will felt the strong urge to insert himself into the conversation, to help back Miranda up in any way he could, against any possible push back that might happen. But another part of him knew better, Will had witness Miranda stand her ground when push came to shove and he knew she could stand on her own without his assistance. But that didn’t mean he would not stand at the ready just in case, she might have had a fair share of stubborn or bullheaded people, but she never dealt with Jack’s own special brand of the trait. “I’m the founder and runner of Scarlet Swan Fashion, it’s a fashion boutique for men and your wife is a very respectable client of mine. Often or not she calls around three times each year or every other.” Miranda smiled fondly, obvious she did not suffer from the impact of the stone filled question and Jack eased in his act, after being given confirmation of nothing to worry about.

“It’s alright, if anything I should apologize for the third-degree act, the job makes you a bit paranoid sometimes and if you ask anyone I can come off as a bit over protective of my Bella.” Jack smiled as he unfolded his arms, to show he was more at ease around her.

“It’s completely understandable, you are not the first protective husband I have encountered, it comes with the job. Especially when it involves the wife and wanting to surprise her husband.” Miranda smiled as she began to look around the group giving everyone just as equal amount of attention. “The countless times someone had called demanding to know why their wife has been acting so secretive and accusing me of being some louse they’ve been having an affair with,” Miranda let out a breath and a shake of her head, “it’s far more times than I can count on one hand.” She added before she leaned away from Will and Jack copied the movement and leaned in close. “And between you and I, I can get that same way when it comes between me and my partner,” her voice a playful whisper as casted Will a look to match, that he couldn’t quite see and turned back to Jack with a smile, “just don’t tell Will that.” She wrinkled her nose playfully and Jack nodded his head in the same manner.

“Gotcha these lips are sealed.” He said with same volume and tone paired with a quick nod, before they leaned away. Both pleased to clear any confusion that could have been born at

any moment, but instead it was replaced with a fond experience and slight approval towards one another.

Miranda looked away from Jack and over to Hannibal, who stood just slightly outside the greeting circle. More focused on analyzing the interaction that was taking place and wondering if Miranda might be accepted so easily by the others. Just as Alana so easily accepted her when the two had met for the first time. The whole thing made him feel unaligned, wondering why they didn't see the ruse that was being played out in front of them. They were children sitting in front of a puppet show and Miranda was the puppet-master and the puppet was the person suit she parade for them.

"And I don't need to introduce myself to you, do I Doctor Lecter." Maranda stated with a warm smile, but something daring laid beneath it, teasing to be caught and pulled out the open by the other.

"No there is no need for that," Hannibal replied as he inserted himself into the group, that he was willing to play outsider for. "Though I must agree with Will, I was quiet taken back to see you here." He added as he clasped his hands in front of himself. Miranda just shrugged as she placed her hand on to Will's chest once more.

I can clearly see what you are trying to accomplish with your hand placement Rhettford. You want to show to the rest of these drones, these people who you feel are beneath you as I often feel the same, that Will is all yours. It was the same reason for the oh so heartwarming embrace the two you shared only a few moments ago. Go ahead and flaunt to your hearts content, you will not see a reaction out of me, I am far above that. Hannibal thought on the edge of bitterness as he ran his eyes over the sight the couple had painted. It was ripped straight out of one of those over played romance movies that networks love to run every time a major holiday teased to come around the corner. Where the network believed they were brining entertainment to those who labeled themselves as helpless romantics or those in need of proof that love was for anyone. In reality the movies were merely cluttering the air waves and wasting others time.

"What can I say, I like to be spontaneous sometimes," She smiled, "Will can tell you that, right sweetheart." She turned that smile up to Will.

"Yeah, and today's visit just proves it doesn't it." He answered as he returned her smile with oddly ease and a light airy chuckle.

"Well it was a pleasure to meet you Miss. Rhettford." Jack said pointing the topic back towards the group. "But some of us have work to do." He added with a stern look pointed towards the three scientists, who deflected the look with the best of their ability to play nonchalant. "So, if you'll excuse my team and I." He said with a slight bow of his head and a smile.

"And it was a pleasure to meet you as well Mister. Crawford," Miranda smiled, before she guided her attention to the other three, "as well as the rest of you. I do hope we might be able to gather again sometime. When it's not in the middle of important work and what not."

“Yeah, same here.” Beverly said, “maybe we call all go grab a beer or something like that one of these days.”

“Sounds fun.” Miranda replied before the other two scientist bided their goodbyes and turned to begin their journey back to the lab with Beverly leading the way.

“Can you believe it,” Will caught Zeller saying to Jimmy while they were still in ear shot. “Not only does she actually exist, but she runs her own fashion line.” The man let out a sigh and hung his head. “Its official god is a woman.”

“That or god just really likes to mess with you.” Jimmy replied, which earned a short laugh from Beverly.

“I’m going with both here.” She said just as they walked out of ear shot and turned a corner.

“Like I said before,” Jack spoke, the last of the original four to still be in their presence, “I have some work that needs to be done and once again it was nice to meet you Miss. Rhettford.”

“You as well, and perhaps you and Phyllis would like to join Will and I for dinner one of these nights. Phyllis is such a respectable client of mine and this way we can all get to know one another better.” Miranda offered. Jack tilted his head slightly taking in the proposal and every inch of Will hoped the answer would be a resound decline. The last thing on earth he wanted was to have a couple’s night out with his boss and wife. A part of him wanted to ask Miranda why she even asked in the first place without consulting it with him first, but then again, she did just sing to Lecter about how she liked to be spontaneous at times and her was another example of the fact.

“I’ll think about it and relay the idea over to Bella.” Jack smiled with a nod of his head. It wasn’t a yes nor was it a no, even though it could go either way. Something told Will it would go in Miranda’s favor rather than his.

“Good to know and once more it a pleasure to meet you.” Miranda said and the three watched as Jack walked off in the opposite direction, back to his office and disappeared around the corner. Leaving only Will, Miranda, and Hannibal to take up the space of the hall. “Alright now that, that’s over with,” Miranda spoke catching the two men’s attention and turning it back to herself. “I believe there are some issues that we need to get cleared up isn’t there.”

Will lead the two over towards the nearest conveniently empty conference room. It really wasn’t that difficult to locate one, when thought about. The whole building was filled with so many, made for the abundance of agents that roamed the halls. Yet it always felt like the place was always deserted except for himself and the rest of the team at some point.

"This one should work." Will commented. *Let's hope no one chooses this specific room to hold a conference in. But then that would just be my luck wouldn't it. Trying to patch things together with Lecter and Miranda and have the head of the FBI come walking in on use.* Will thought to himself as he pushed the door open with one arm, before he offered to hold it open for Miranda and Hannibal to enter.

"Thank you, sweetheart." Miranda smiled as she entered and Will managed to conjure up a sufficient smile in return. Even though the thought of the future conversation that laid ready to be born and take on a form waited on the other side of the threshold tried to weigh down his facial muscle. He found it in him to give her a smile in response to her affection.

Hannibal followed after Miranda, dipping his head in a silent thanks as he entered the room. The possibility of whatever fable Miranda planned to spin in her deceitful web she caringly crafted for the rest of the flies that buzzed about the building. Played through his mind as he stepped through the held open door. So caught up in his thoughts he almost missed how Will returned the head nod. The profiler found it easier to do the simple motion than it was to smile. After everyone was inside the once vacant room Will closed the door behind himself. Mentally preparing himself, drawing any possibility that might happen during and after their conversation. He found all those possible outcomes landing in the land of negativity and tried to come up with some small positive outcome, but like the smile he found it exhausting to do so.

Miranda walked over to the oval shaped table and elegantly perched herself on the edge of it. Will walked over to stand across from her and leaned against the adjacent wall, while Hannibal stood a few feet on the right. Completing the odd triangle that they had managed to form, all three evenly spaced as two of the trio waited for the elephant in the room to be brought up. Miranda let out an elegant sigh, slightly adjusted herself. Draping one leg over the other and made it clear that she planned on starting the conversation, right when everyone had gotten settled into their place.

"Alright I know I have some explaining on my part to do," Miranda breathed out as she placed her hands in her lap. “And where I’d like to start is with an apology to the both of you.” She shared a look between the two. “I need to apologies to you Will for the way I acted on the phone last Friday and to you Doctor Lecter for the way I have been interacting with you. All of this has been a complete wildfire and sadly I am the one to blame for it all.”

To say Hannibal was caught off guard by the clear acceptance of fault would be an understatement. It took every ounce of well-tuned facial muscle to not look how he had felt. The last thing he thought off as he was led down to the hall and into the conference room was for Miranda to blatantly accept the accusations that were thrown her way, thanks to his venture Friday morning. There had to be more to this, a web to be woven, a story to tale, there had to be more and he knew it. He just had to wait and listen to see where this would all go and hope that Will did not fall into whatever tale of deceit that she planned to recite to them.

“What do you mean?” Will asked as he adjusted his stance and crossed his arms. Miranda let out a small sigh and practically deflated on the spot.

“I suppose the first thing to do is try and explain this issue with this “flirting” business that Doctor Lecter came to you about.” Miranda said as she looked over at Hannibal, “you see I have this persona I like to wear around men of your stature; it comes with the way I run my business. It might come off as flirty, but believe me it’s not and the last thing I wanted to do when it came to those times, we interacted was to come off in such a manner especially to such a dear friend of Will’s. Trust me when I say, I was not flirting you Doctor Lecter,” She

turned to look over at Will, “or trying to ruin what we have been building together Will, I never wanted to hurt you and I felt so guilty for making you believe that I ever would especially after our phone call those nights back over what Brittney told you.”

“Then what were you trying to accomplish Miss. Rhettford?” Hannibal asked, navigating himself through the winding tale and conjuring up predictions that might fall out of Miranda’s well-polished mouth.

“I was merely trying to gain your friendship that’s all Doctor Lecter.” Miranda replied smoothly as she looked away from Will and over to Hannibal. Once again Hannibal had to hold back his true reaction and stay as neutral as possible. Even though he wanted to scoff at the answer, because he knew the statement was as false as his want to help the FBI out of the goodness of his heart was. But he managed to keep himself tied together.

“You see, I know you and Will have a close friendship with one another and I know that we didn’t really get off on the right foot back when we met at the art auction. Will can even tell you that I felt that you and I didn’t really see eye to eye that night. At first, I thought nothing of it, Will even told me not to worry, but the more the it weighed on my mind the more I wanted to remedy that ill will we might have. So that way there were no shaky grounds between us. I even mentioned that night that I’d hate for whatever negative emotions we might share between us might get in the way of yours and Will’s friendship or Will’s and I relationship.” Miranda said as she looked back and forth at the two, before standing up and straightening herself. “So, when I called Will the other night and you picked up, I thought that was my chance, but obviously I let habits and personas slip over me and I came off as flirtatious when I really hadn’t ment to.”

“What about the late-night call after opera?” Will asked his voice lace with skepticism. He did not quite look Miranda’s way with his eyes cast downward, arms crossed over his chest. Clear that he had closed himself off. Hannibal was somewhat pleased to see that Will wasn’t easily falling for the ploy as one might think. But in truth Will wanted to believe what Miranda was telling him, but something was not letting him accept it. As if something was holding him back from crossing over the bridge that Miranda was building for him. It was a tight grip on he felt. Slowly pulling him back, while Miranda slowly beckoned him forward and he did not know which way he should lean.

“Sadly all part of it,” Miranda sighed ducking her head down, “you see I did need to use your phone and it was all coincidental that I had stumbled upon Doctor Lecter’s number. I hoped to use it later on and explain myself and what I was trying to do. But after the opera I sort of got excited of the possible connection, that I jumped the gun and I just wanted to tell him the wonderful night we had, because,” She looked up and turned towards Hannibal. “You see it’s no secret that you are a known fan of the art and I was just hoping Will and my experience might help us work towards bettering our staggering relationship.” Miranda let out a breath and shook her head slightly. “Listen I know the way I got your number was sneaky and underhanded, border lining invasive. I know that now and I apologies deeply,” Miranda placed a hand to her chest and bowed forward to help emphasize her point.

“But I didn’t want Will to know what was happening.” She turned back to Will. Miranda looked so drawn down, almost deflated and a part Will wanted to sooth those negative

emotions away, but instead he just stood there and listened. Not quite sure if he bought all that Miranda was saying, yet she looked so sincere when it came to explaining the whole thing. Reminding Will of his initial thought of it all being a giant misunderstanding. “The last thing I wanted was for you to feel like you needed to pick sides between us or feel like whatever possible negative outcome that fell between us was because of you. I never wanted that to happen like how I never wanted Doctor Lecter to feel uncomfortable with how I acted. I also never ment to seem as though I was threating our relationship over this flirting issue. It was all a giant out of control misunderstanding.”

What a wonderful tale Rhettford. Hannibal thought as he measured the story out in his mind. *If I didn’t know the full truth, I might have fallen for such a play like any other simple-minded fool. I also must commend you, once again willing to lower yourself to the filthily ground and tarnish your pride to gain any little grounds you hope to stand on. But once again I must prove that I too can use my own sharp tongue to guide a conversation. Let’s see how filthy you are willing to become in this game.*

“If that is the case and this is all just a misunderstanding than why Miss. Rhettford did you act so hostile on the phone with Will, when he went and looked for your side in all this?” Hannibal asked, ready to see how Miranda might twist her way out of the question. She had painted herself so ill during the phone call, that it had Will leaning towards him, how would Miranda handle trying to tilt Will towards herself. When Hannibal grasp was slowly tightening around the younger man. The question was not only spoken out of curiosity, but also as a reminder to Will on how Miranda had made him feel and how quickly she was ready to strike him when he simply pushed of a simple answer.

“Yes, I know the way I acted on the phone with Will was clade and unsavory. But I will admit that I was having a very hectic morning and let’s face it Will, with my flight I had little to no room for such a subject heavy phone call.” Miranda slightly chuckled humorlessly with a small shake of her head. Will did not voice his own agreement to the statement. It was sadly true on his part, thinking back to it he really should have held off until Miranda had come back from her trip. But like he told Jack a frantic mind was an unpredictable mind and he felt like that during the time. “But how I reacted did not help my side of the ordeal I’ll admit. I could have handled it better instead of running around in a circle and deflecting your simple question. All you wanted to know was if what Doctor Lecter had told you was true and I really should have came clean then and there.” She let out another sigh. “I honestly don’t know why I didn’t, maybe it was because I felt so shocked that you were accusing me of something so ugly and in turn, I got defensive instead of trying to listen.” She walked over to Will; who lowered his arms in response to being approached, and Miranda reached over and gently took his hands in hers.

They both watched as she began to rub her thumbs over his knuckles. “And I am truly sorry for what that might have caused you to think. You must have thought the worst of me; especially after you told me how uneased you felt after what Brittney told you about my past dating life and I am so sorry for all those awful thoughts that might have come forth because of it.” She said before looking up to meet Will’s eyes and he felt himself become trapped in the desperate hold for his attention. “Please forgive me Will.” Her voice heavy with a drop of a plead intertwin in the words.

Will's eyes danced around her face, taking in her expression, and letting her words finally sink into his mind. Will felt split, one half wanted to openly forgive her, tell her that everything was fine and they can just move on from there. Yet the other half he felt a small mound of anger pointed towards her actions and deceitfulness. Though the act of wanting bridge the gap between herself and Lecter made since, it was the way she did it that caused such an irksome feeling. She had made Lecter feel uncomfortable and had the man come to his house to voice it. And when he looked for a simple answer that now that he thought about could have all been easily explained in a phone call and not have been dragged out like it had. It made the mound shift and rumble. He wanted to be madder at it all, all the emotional havoc that it brought. But then didn't he get his wish, of it turning out to be all a misunderstanding.

Hannibal could see Will faulting in her hold. Seeing Will leaning towards her more and more as she held his hands and trapped him in her eyes. Hannibal felt the urge to step between the two and rip their hands a part. Drag Will out of the room and demand to know what could possibly be going through his mind. Here he often referred to it as brilliant and at the moment it was lowering itself to the same level as those who roam the building.

Now is not the time to falter dear Will, Hannibal thought as he watched Will try to find his words that would reveal what might be going through his mind. As he tried to straighten and short through his dishevel feelings. *I can recall those raw emotions that you were feeling after that deliciously deceitful phone call. You were pacing on the porch while they bubbled and stewed inside you while Miranda slowly turned up the fiery displeasure that ignited under you. With each mind twisting word she told you that had you questioning the relationship, the more you felt those emotions roll upward. Threating to boil over and spill out into sharp lashing words. Do not forget that Will, do not cave so easily for her mendacious words.*

"Miranda, I want to forgive you I do, but you caused such a big rift and I don't know how I should feel about all this to be honest." Will revealed as he looked down at their entwine hands. Watching as Miranda's manicured thumbs lightly ran over his knuckles, trying to sooth his freshly ripped open wired feelings. Hannibal smiled inwardly at Will's words, though he was somewhat disappointed that Will showed room for the possibility of forgiveness. He did not exactly come out and forgive Miranda on the spot, showing that he wasn't fully leaning towards Miranda. That there was still a part of Will that was held back, away from the lur that Miranda had casted out.

"I completely understand sweetheart," Miranda spoke letting go of one of Will's hands and using her newly freed appendage to place it caringly on the side of Will's face. To guide him to look up at her and meet her eyes, before she spoke again. "Let me make it up to you please, to the both of you." She added a tad bit louder to involve Hannibal back into the conversation as she looked over at the doctor, lowering her hand and stepping more into the center. "Why don't I take you both out to a nice restaurant that way we can bury the axe once and for all. Start all over again and that way I can make a formal apology with an action and not just words."

"I don't really know about that Miranda." Will began looking over towards Miranda and glancing over at Lecter.

“Please Will, I insist on it.” Miranda smiled, “I want to do something so there will no longer be any harsh feelings on my end.”

“How about instead I invite the both of you over to my house for dinner.” Hannibal coolly spoke as he took a subtle step forward. “That way there is no hassle of finding a suitable place for all three of us to dine at.”

“Now that I don’t really know about.” Miranda playfully stated with a wide smile to match, “I’d feel like that be imposing too much especially when I’m the one that needs to be making it up to the both of you.” It was clear that Miranda was searching for control of the situation, hence why Hannibal easily stepped up to challenge the hold she tried to keep her hands around. Now that he had shown his own harsh grip and demonstrated his strength, Miranda was scrambling to regain herself. Even though her outer appearance did not show any sign of the struggle. Hannibal could hear it in her light chuckle and slight shift in her stance.

“Now it seems like it is my turn to insist, for along with my appreciation for the opera that floats around the social scene, my culinary abilities do as well. So I am sure that you have heard about my skills when it comes to cooking, along with how I’m known to preform those skills towards others.” Hannibal tilted his head with a small stretch of his lips. It could be seen as a friendly micro smile, but pointed towards Miranda it was more of a dare to decline. “Think of it as an extending of an olive branch. To show no harsh feelings on my end as well.” He added with an upward tilt of his head and curl of the right edge of his lips. The smile turned into a mocking smirk.

“Well when you put it that way,” Miranda drawled out, clear she did not want to agree with the act, but knew better than to outright refuse. Hannibal once again could see the struggle over the power he was so easily taking away from her and he was basking in it. “What are your thoughts on this Will, I mean you are also involved in this manner after all.” The basking abruptly stopped, for all this internal fighting over power and control he had forgotten the reason why. Lost in the enticing mind twisting wit sharping game he had been playing with Miranda, Hannibal once again blinded himself to the reason behind it, *Will*. Who was now unknowingly given a piece to finally play in the game. His decision would either give Miranda the upper hand or chop off the appendage and hand it over to Hannibal. The same could be said for the man, how ever the agent decided to the place his misaligned piece it would heavily effect both players. All Hannibal could do was only hope that Will acted in his favor and not in Miranda’s.

“Miss. Rhettford is correct,” Hannibal smiled as he closed his hands together and placed them in front of himself again. “You are also involved in this matter, though it has seemed like we have been planning this whole thing and that you might feel as though you have no say in the manner. That is completely untrue I would very much like to know your opinion as well.” He quirked his head slightly and crinkled his eyes, to help show a more friendly and almost docile effect. A more welcoming effect.

Will swallowed thickly, here Miranda had stated how she never wanted to have him feeling like he might have to choose between the two and here he was in that exact position. Being pulled in both direction and either way might cause damage. He felt as though he was in a lose, lose situation and he could practically feel himself beginning to split in the seem with

each tug of words that came out of their mouths. Will almost hoped that the two would just go back to discussing this supposable dinner event like he wasn't there.

"Perhaps, dinner at Hannibal's might be the best option," Will's words were slow to leave his mouth as he decided their fate. A decision he was all too happy not to make, but was forced to deal his hand in, rather he liked it or not when he was dragged into it. "That way it can be more intimate with the three of us and you won't have to deal with the hassle of trying to plan for a reservation and the issue that might come up if it turns out the restaurant might not be up to everyone's liking." He explained hoping Miranda might understand why he chose to go with Hannibal's idea more than hers. It made sense to him, choosing familiar over social normality.

Miranda blinked a few times, clear that the final choice was slowly sinking in, the shock of not having it going her way, was amusing to watch and Hannibal once again fought to conceal the beaming emotion that coated him so righteously.

Well would you look at that Rhettford, Will has chosen me over you once again sharing habits with his own dogs, showing loyalty. Are you really that surprise to find that Will would choose something so familiar, something less socially straining like a crowded restaurant. This is what happens I'm afraid Rhettford when you push someone away, strike at them the way you had, they are hesitant to fully come back to you.

"Alright when you put it that way, then it's settled I guess." Miranda breathed; clear she was trying to keep her disappointment towards Will's choice in check and try to come off as open to the rest.

"Then we have it; I hope tomorrow night will work for the two of you. Let's say around seven." Hannibal said and Will just numbly nodded his head in agreement as he experienced some sort of unwanted high from his choice. Unsure if it was right or not, but at the same time not completely regretting his decision in the end.

"Yes, seven works for me as well." Miranda smiled, as she slipped into a more docile form as she finally accepted the decision.

"Wonderful," Hannibal crinkled his eyes in amusement as he rode his own high of triumph. "I can't wait to have you for dinner Miss Rhettford, so we can finally put all this behind us and hopefully move forward in a more savory way."

"The same can be said for myself," Miranda replied, "and please call me Miranda, if we truly want to move forward, I say we finally drop the formalities." She tilted her head to the side, with a raised eyebrow, purse of her lips, and dare in her eyes. "Wouldn't you agree Doctor Lecter?" There it was one final strike, before their interaction came to a close.

"In that case please call me Hannibal."

Seven could not arrive any sooner, even if Hannibal had managed to grab Father Time by the neck and twist it. So that the fictional being would have no other choice than to play in his own favor. Hannibal would admit that he was not entirely pleased with the choice he had made, with inviting Miranda into his home. Where her presence would no doubt stain his

carefully crafted accommodation. But he wanted, no he needed to make his move in the game quick, before she could take even more of an advantage. Miranda had already made such a large movement when she had so willingly painted herself in such a terrible light. A move the Hannibal chastised himself for not being able to entirely predict. Because he hated to admit, it was a very cunning ploy, why try to fight to redeem yourself when you can play in the vastly open space of the negative light. Ask for forgiveness rather than prey for understanding.

Hannibal stood in his kitchen, as his latest piece sat proudly on his kitchen island, freshly pulled out of the oven, and waiting for him to bestow upon it the final touches to make it a complete master piece. Until then though it gifted the doctor with its savory smell that slowly filled the well-equipped space. Far more favorable than the low sound of lightly played classical music could. Even though the soft voice of the many clarinets paired with the meaty vocals of the heavily played tubas tried to grab his attention with one of his senses, nothing could hold him like the meals he so lovingly made in his second favorite room in the house. The man after meticulously moving around the kitchen half of the night like a well entuned machine. Had finally found time to actually stop and take in what he had been doing while the clock slowly ticked by. At some point when he would glance at the clock after completing a task, he would feel himself becoming displeased to see how little time had passed by. It felt often that it was prolonging that night's event on purpose and slowing down just to mock him.

Now though, as he finally stood still, he had the chance to pay that dreary clock once again an ounce of his attention and he was pleased to see what numbers it had to show him. It wasn't exactly the rounded number of seven o'clock, but it was close. Six forty-five and if he knew of Will's habit of being punctually polit, the man and his acquaintance would be arriving in fifteen minutes. Hannibal gave his surroundings one more steady look, making sure everything was aligned right for the night, before he left to get himself presentable. When he leisurely cascaded the stairs after going through what he would be wearing for the night; choosing to go with a black three piece that had such a dark red etching traveling through it one might miss the second color if he chose to stay out of the light. As he adjusted the cufflink of his well pressed suit coat, Hannibal noticed that time was starting to play to his favor. He had only two minutes until his guest's arrival and with those ticking two minutes Hannibal continued his leisurely walk over to the door.

When he arrived to the large opposing door, he flicked over his wrist and took in the one minute he still had sitting in front of him. Hannibal moved over to subtly peer out through the curtains and he could not help the way the edge of his lips moved upward as he watched a familiar silver and red Rolls Royce pull up to his house.

Right on time as always. Hannibal watched as the luxury car came to a stop, but that smile that had snuck its way onto his face faltered when he noticed Will's head pop up on the driver side of the car, his wild curls once again tamed thanks to thoughtfully applied hair jell.

What was the idea that led to having Will drive your car Rhettford, are you trying to claim as much as this night as possible before entering my space, or are you trying to prove to Will how easily you are willing to sink in order to keep yourself in his sight. Have him thinking of you through the night while I hold the spotlight for this evening.

Will closed the door and an easy smile decorated the profiler's face as he came around the front of the car. Hannibal took in the rest of the younger man's appearance, it was no art auction style, but it still held Hannibal's eyes non the less. Giving him such a pleased feeling that Will took the time to actually come off as presentable for the evening's dinner, though he would have felt just as pleased if Will wore his casual wear, revealing to the psychiatrist that he felt the warm emotion towards the idea of simply having Will in his presence. Will wore a suit coat that was the color of a natural shadow, paired with a deep navy-blue dress shirt. All those dark colors would easily play at the hues of Will's ever shifting eyes. Either bring them out or casting an eerie shadow into them, darkening them to those who caught their glances or bringing a subtle light to them when they would grace one's sight. Hannibal found him intrigued to see which option he would be gifted as soon as Will entered his home.

Hannibal watched as Will played the gentleman roll that he often hid and pulled the passenger door open. Holding his hand for Miranda to delicately take as she was helped out of the car, an equal smile painted her face. Miranda straightened herself out by running a hand down her burgundy pencil styled dress, before fixing the black fabric belt that hugged her waist and running a finger over the black trimmed open collar. Will must have said something that caused Miranda to snicker and playfully slap at his arm, which in turn had him taking step back with his own amusement. Hannibal could not help, but bitterly narrow his eyes in distain in response at the sight, only tearing himself away when he noticed that the *couple*; the word still caused a small amount of tar to bubble inside him, begin to make their way towards his door. Arms once again entwined with one another.

The elegant chime of the doorbell played out in his home, a few seconds later and Hannibal stood silently next to the door. To give an impression that he might be in another room and not where he currently stood. Why give them the impression that he was eagerly waiting their arrival, when it was so much more amusing to have them believing how occupied he might be preparing the nights meal. He adjusted his already properly straight tie as he waited for a few more well-fed seconds before reaching towards the door and opening his home up for his guests.

"Good evening." Hannibal greeted with a well manufactured smile.

"And good evening to you as well Hannibal." Miranda greeted first with an almost identical smile and Hannibal felt a sliver of disgust travel over himself as he listened to his name slip past Miranda's lips. If she had never made the call to drop the formalities and he had never had to live up to proper etiquette, he would have never allowed such a thing to happen in the first place.

"Evening." Will simply replied with a quick nod of his head and a stretch of his lips.

"Please come in, tonight's meal is nearly ready," Hannibal spoke as he stepped back from the door and held it open for the two to enter. "All I have to do is make a few more small preparations." He finished as he closed the door after Will and Miranda had fully entered his house. Hannibal fought off the image of black etching cracks that spread out from under every hard clack of Miranda's fashionable black pumps as the woman stepped into his house. Infecting it with her mere presence.

“I can’t wait,” Miranda smiled as she turned towards the man, “Will has done nothing, but spoke praise of your cooking the whole drive over here.” Miranda sent Will a sly look that had the other nearly ducking his head as shy smile played his face. With his head ducked Will missed the micro egotistical smile that barley graced Hannibal’s face. Knowing that Will’s appraisal towards him must have felt like nails on a chalkboard for Miranda had that hardening heat filled feeling slowly submitting back into place inside himself.

“Why don’t I show you to where we will be dining this evening.” Hannibal slightly bowed as he took charge and led the two back to his dining room. Savoring the prediction that might play out as soon as they entered his third favorite room in the luxurious house.

“So that’s where the painting went.” Will spoke as they entered the readily prepared dining room, to say that he was a bit muddled at the appearance of the Fenrir painting would say very little. He had expected to see it in Hannibal’s office when they had their appointment, but he blamed it on the fact that at the time he was pacing the space trying to arrange his boiling emotions at the time and thought he had missed it. But now as he entered the welcoming space with its cool tones and the soft beckoning of music Will was reunited with the piece. His eyes traveled over the painting that sat proudly between two horns on top of the dormant fire place taking the spot that once held a very well painted copy of Franҫois Boucher’s “Leda and the Swan.” The semi erotic painting between a bare woman and a god disguised as the elegant water fowl; an art piece that Will never paid much attention to whenever he spent his time in the room, was now gone. Replaced with the struggling animal, that Will once again found his mind being trapped by. As his eyes traveled over the frozen gleaming gold chains and the soundless snarl of the beast’s open chaotic jaw. It’s sharpened pitch-dark claws digging gouges into the hard rock made ground. If he focused only a little more on to the painting Will could feel the licking furry that the talented brush strokes portrayed in the wolf’s eyes and twisting body. It had him wondering if he could feel the emotions from a painting than perhaps when he closed his eyes, he might be able to hear the angelic clinks of the serpent snapping chains as well.

“How very interesting,” Miranda took a place by Will, blocking off his side from Hannibal as she also took in the painting. “If I recall correctly, I thought you mentioned wanting to put it in your office. Why the change of heart?” She turned her attention towards Hannibal, waiting for his smooth reply.

“Yes, well that was the initial plan, but I thought better of it,” Hannibal paid a second’s glance at the painting, before turning his sharp gaze onto Miranda, “I found it would suite the dining room far better.” Hannibal waited for a response, for Miranda to open her mouth and let something slither out. But nothing, the only sound that could be heard was the soft music that traveled through the speakers, as the two just watched one another. Waiting for the other to strike the next move, daring to show the predator that lay pacing inside themselves. Exchanging small snarls and flashes of teeth, yet neither risking the move. Instead, relying on edging the other on and see what might slip when pushed too far.

“Glad you found a place for it.” Will spoke, for the second time after entering the room, no longer trapped by the painting. He had felt a shift in the air after Miranda had stepped next to him, he could tell that the waters between her and Hannibal were still as choppy as when they had all gathered the other day. The physical emotion was enough to drag him to reality.

Though they only spared one another a few words, Will could pick up on the tension as if it was built on more.

“Thank you.” Was all that could be said, “Why don’t you two have a seat while I go prepare what we will be having for this evening’s meal.” Hannibal motioned to the two chairs with his head, before heading towards the second door that led to the kitchen. Will felt another shift take place, he had managed to redirect the tension and something told him that he might have to keep doing that for the rest of the evening.

This might be a long night. Will could feel the regret slowly bubble inside himself as they moved to the table. Causing him to wonder if he had chosen right with Hannibal’s proposal over Miranda’s. At the moment in time he had felt misaligned, with the sudden visit followed by the emotional heavy reveal. Will found himself reaching out and scrambling for something he could latch onto. Something he knew was right there ready to take his hold and stabilize himself and who he had reached out towards was Hannibal instead of Miranda, his *girlfriend*. Even at the moment in time Will still could not understand why he had done that, when he felt equally stable feeling towards Miranda as well. Will left his thoughts when he noticed Miranda approaching her seat and he quickly went over to pull the steady oak chair out for her.

“Why thank you sweetheart,” Miranda smiled warmly as she daintily took the seat, “always the gentleman for me.” She nearly purred as she slowly gazed over at Hannibal with a daring look in her eyes. Hannibal felt another snarl begging to be born, but he held himself back, clinging to the fact that he had the home advantage in both a literal and metaphorical sense.

“You’re welcome darlin’” Will replied automatically, the sudden usage of the pet name nearly lost on him after helping Miranda scoot up to the table. Until Miranda spoke.

“Oh, was that a hint of an accent that I picked up?” She asked with a tilt of her head and a glint in her eyes as she watched Will move around the table to go take his seat. Miranda wasn’t the only one caught by the sudden insertion of the name, along with the reveal of the slight twang of an accent. Hannibal found himself halting in the doorway, gathering his thoughts wondering if what had fallen onto his ears were correct or not. With their time together and the little information that Will often revealed of his past to Hannibal, it often baffled the man how little Will reverted back onto his natural accent. Never letting even the smallest amount of Cajun lick or other slippage of his natural born southern tongue escape into his words. Now and then Will would throw in some sayings when he would talk, but not once were those words filled with an accent that no doubt ran though his vocals and wet his tongue when he was younger.

After the question was asked was when the sentence that Will had spoken suddenly registered for him and he couldn’t help the dry almost bashful chuckle that escaped his lips as he adjusted himself in his seat.

“Yeah, I guess it was.” Will internally bit himself for the accidental slip. He often praised himself for being able to mask his accent around others especially when he would say a southern saying, or talk about where he grew up. But for some unknown reason the simple six-letter name, *darlin’* had caused it to spill out of him, he might as well had said *Cher*

instead. “I guess after all these years away from Louisiana, it still manages to reveal its head in my speech. Now and then.” He looked up at Miranda with a weary smile.

“I didn’t know you came from Louisiana.” Miranda smiled as she entwined her fingers and pressed them under her chin. “Once again you are proving to me how interesting you can be Will.” If it wasn’t for the meal, Hannibal realized he would have stayed in the doorway and listened to whatever conversation that could be forming between the two. What tales that might be revealed even more from Will’s life before the FBI, but hosting duties called for being higher priority and it had the man leaving the tantalizing tale in favor of it.

“Tonight we will be having slow roasted pork neck drizzled in a green olive sauce with walnuts and parsley.” Hannibal walked back into the dining room caring the main dish for the night carefully held in his hands. Before setting it down, bringing the two out whatever deep conversation they might be having and placing himself back into the center of attention. “It will also be paired with cherry farro salad with sweet vinaigrette. Along with a simple potato puree.” He added giving them both an equally split look, as he adjusted the plate, the long piece of meat shined under the cool light and Will caught the bitter tangy scent of the green olives that battled against the savory smell from the pork. The two scents clashed against one another, only thing that kept them from a full out battle for dominance was whatever earthly spices that were mixed in the sauce and rubbed into the flesh of the cut. It helped form a ground for the two to coexist on.

“Smells wonderful.” Miranda complimented with another pristine smile that she must have showed every client under her listing. That had been practiced and rehearsed for so long in her life that it easily fooled those who she showed it to. Have them believing that the smile that she was giving them was actually genuine from the start and not just a well-placed mask.

The two guests watched as Hannibal began to skillfully plate their meals, gingerly placing the first plate in front of Miranda’s watchful stare. Though it was the proper etiquette to serve the woman first, a more dominant part of himself wanted to give the first slice of meat and first serving of sides to Will. But he had to control himself, knowing the falter would easily be caught by not just Miranda, but by Will as well. Hannibal had to remind himself of the reason for the event, the goal of the game and what favorable outcome that might happen. It also had him wondering what Miranda might be feeling, was it something suffocating, twisting around her throat and threating to cut off her airway while being in his home, where he held the highest status. Leaving to do nothing but wait and ready herself for his next move. Did she feel misplaced while she sat there waiting for her pound of flesh, was her mind racing with whatever outcome might happen this night.

“Thank you,” Miranda added as Hannibal placed her plate in front of her, playing into the polite guest as if putting on a comfortable coat. Hannibal only gave a nod in reply, masking it with being indulged in the task of preparing Will’s serving. “Will and I were just discussing his time in New Orleans, before your return.” Hannibal placed Will’s plate in front of the man and barely caught Will’s thanks, before his attention was strongly drawn away and towards what might come from out of Miranda’s mouth.

“How very interesting.” Hannibal once again hid his emotions, trying to place anytime in their own personal conversations had Will ever mentioned his early life in the bustling

cultural pumping city. The life that existed before Virginia, before the FBI, before himself. Just like the man's childhood, Will often fed Hannibal small crumbs of his life, keeping himself at a semi far distance when it came to certain personal information. Showing how high and how little his boundaries of intel of himself he was willing to budge when they were in the office during a session. Only giving little information when asked and always ready to redirect the attention back to the doctor. Showing himself as being just as curious or possibly just as cautious as Hannibal himself.

"Yes, it is," Miranda sent Will an amused smile and Will found himself letting out a breath matched with another struggling smile as he picked up his fork and knife and began to cut at his piece of meat. Noticing how the piece of animal flesh easily gave under the simple slice of the knife. "I was just telling him about my own time in the big easy," Miranda picked up her expertly filled wine glass and swirled the golden clear liquid of the La Redonne. Watching as the soft liquid gold gently splashed against the side of the clear glass, barely clinging to the side before settling down into the small pool. The wine held little of the soft light, causing it to rely on its natural shine that came with its color. "How the last time I set foot there was over a decay and a half or so ago when I was just on the verge of launching my brand," Miranda finally took a sip of the wine, just as Hannibal took his seat at the head of the table, with Will always on his right and Miranda taking the temporary seat on his left. "I was invited to attend the Outer Desire fashion show, I wasn't renowned as I am today and at the time it felt like such an honor to be even given the opportunity. Even though I just barely stepped away from my mentor's guidance when it happened and the world of fashion was still new to me." Hannibal let out the smallest of hums and a nod to match, given acknowledgment to the tale even though he found it quite uninteresting. Focusing more on his own cut of meat and fantasizing slightly of the slice coming off of Miranda's body instead of the obnoxious dry cleaner that tried to swindle a few hundred dollars for the trouble she had with a "mysterious" stain that he knew wasn't there when he checked in his suit earlier that week.

"I'm sorry, but did you say the fashion show you were a part of was called Outer Desire?" Will set down his fork and looked over towards Miranda with a slight tilt of his head and a knit of his eyebrows. "And was it run by a heavy-set bald man who always wore white?"

"Yes, it was," Miranda chuckled lightly "A lot of us who were a part of the show would often refer to Mister Bewont as The Egg during the time in order to help keep things light during such a chaotic time. Why do you ask?" Miranda mimicked his head tilt in the opposite direction, her eyes welcoming the question paired with an easy smile that shared the same welcome. Will let out a chuff of a chuckle and shook his head slightly. Hannibal found himself setting down his own utensils in favor of what might be Will's answer.

"It's just I recall being put on crowed control for the outdoor fashion show actually. At the time I was still a rookie on the force and it was my first big event to survey. There was word going around that the event might take a turn because it was said that one of the participants liked to use real fur in their product and it might draw in activists." Will pushed the meat around his plate watching as it cut through the semi clear sauce and brushed up against a walnut. "Turned out it wasn't just speculation, when those activists did show up to protest and it got a bit out of hand." Will gently bobbed his head; eyes slightly wide as he became nearly lost in the memory of his youth.

“Oh I remember that, those activists even though the cause they fought for was nobble, the way they acted was far from it. Especially when they brought out the red paint and tried to charge the stage.” Miranda reminisced as she finally took a bite from the meal. She hummed lightly in approval, but that was all that came from her.

“Yeah, who knew for my first time on crowd control I would go home skin and uniform nearly stained red. I was in the shower for over an hour that night trying to scrub my skin free from the paint.” Will lightly chuckled as he took his first sip of the crisp dry wine, the low acidic note and playful bite of the apple helped refresh his pallet from the savory yet twistingly sweet of the meat. It was the only time in his life that he didn’t feel sick being covered in the harsh color, now when he thought of something red dripping down his skin, clinging to his pours and threating to leave behind its hue he felt his stomach threaten to turn and mind begin to slip.

Miranda let out an amused laugh, easily stealing Will away from the threating decline in his thoughts. As a fond memory begin to show signs of twisting and changing into something that could lash out at him when left unchecked. “Yes, I recall nearly falling into the same boat, luckily for myself I managed to slip behind stage as soon as the first water balloon hit the runway,” Miranda picked up her glass and took another gentil sip of the wine. “But how phenomenal is that, how our paths nearly crossed so far back.” She smiled and once again Will caught a glint playing in her eyes. As the idea danced across his mind as well.

“What a small world.” Will smiled as he took a bite of the pork neck, the tender flesh easily submitting under his bite. Renewing his tastebuds with its rich juices, but the savory taste once again fought with the semi dominant salty tang from the green olive and the warmth from a well induced walnut. The flavors clashed with each other, yet still found a harmony at the same time leaving Will’s tastebuds confused and still wanting for another slice.

“I mean it, how crazy is it that we managed to almost cross paths before now, we were practically in the same vicinity of one another’s aura.” She swirled at her glass and Will watched the disturbed liquid once again as Miranda continued to pounder her statement. “So close, yet so far and years later here we are as a couple and all it took was another crossing of paths, well timed happenstance.” She set down her glass and set Will another smile. “It’s almost like fate had set things up for the two of us.” Will nearly jumped out of his seat when he felt the soft brush of Miranda’s foot against his inner leg.

“To believe in fate is to believe in a divine path, that our lives are laid out in front of us by some higher power.” Will simply stated as he tried to regain his composer from the sudden contact that was taking place under the table. “That being said that would also mean that nothing that we chose to do nor say has any significant meaning to it and that we will all end up where we are ment to be when we reach the end of our journey, the end of the line you could say.” Miranda looked as though she was taking in what Will was basically rambling about while he fought off whatever reaction Miranda was trying to ignite in him as she skillfully continued to brush up and down against his leg.

“Then perhaps both our separate paths were always made to cross at one point and entwine together. Maybe whatever being that creates the roads that we all must travel on could not make up their mind when to have them collied and had them falter for a while until they

decided to intervein. Finally able to make up their mind on where they wanted us to be." Miranda lightly crinkled her eyes and Will could feel a slow heat slowly rise up on his neck teasing to infect his cheeks.

"Perhaps."

There was a lull followed after the spill of fate and odd happenstance, Hannibal was somewhat pleased to have everything slowly move away from the topic. He felt his appetite begin to turn away at the sight of Will becoming fluster by the way Miranda had been playing with him under the table. It had him wondering if Miranda knew that he was aware of what was happening and that was why she played with Will for a while, before finally stopping after a few long-passed seconds. He could also feel the newly transformed jealousy trying to come alive inside of him during their little spill. Wanting him to intervene in the conversation and turn it into something more palpable. But he was caught by the harden crust and Will's view on fate and where his mind laid on the topic. Along with how easily he seemed to falter into Miranda's own words on the matter and how they easily dripped into his thoughts and buried themselves, making them hers and having him believe that they were his. Weighing into the idea of their paths always meaning to cross at some point and having that crust crackle with each movement of his chewing.

"I never did ask," Will spoke drawing both their attention towards him once again, "how did your trip to California go?" Miranda set down her utensil and dabbed her mouth with the cloth napkin, before answering.

"It went well. A simple collaboration project set to release by this summer. Bit boring for the first few days and a bit lonely as well." Miranda smiled as she gave Will a subtle wink.

"Even with Brittney?" Will asked with a heavy swallow, still somewhat recovering from Miranda's game of footsie that only ended a few moments ago. "I mean the way she hangs around you ready for every beck and call. Along with her need to please I'd be surprised she left you alone for one day."

"She only left me alone because I finally put my foot down and suspended her for the time being." Miranda's voice was cold and harsh as she no longer looked straight up, choosing to straighten her utensils instead.

"Really, I heard you had a high tolerance for her behavior." Hannibal commented as he placed down his own utensils and turned his attention fully on her. "Why the sudden fold?" He noticed the subtle way Miranda prickled at the comment and how she tried to force her composer. Biting the insider of her cheek while she came up with a reply.

"Mostly I do," Miranda words were crisp and on edge, there was an irritation in her voice, where it was coming from was hard to identify. "But after the stunt she pulled with Will, that had her on very thin ice in my eyes and a few other sloppy faults in her work," Miranda let out a sigh, "I no longer had the patience to handle her behavior. Could no longer stand having her constant parasitic behavior around my office and the constant crossing of professional and personal lives. So until she can understand where we stand, she is on suspension until I say otherwise. Then she is welcomed back with hopefully a better understanding of the environment that I create at work."

“Well with her excessive need to please those above her, I believe that she will very much understand where she went wrong.” Will spoke.

“Though, if she is anything how Will described her to me, she might also become a little more obsessed with idea of wanting to please you, causing a more drastic turn in her behavior.” Hannibal added as he closed his hands together, trying not sound a bit pleased at the implication that he could paint for Miranda to picture.

“Oh, should I be worried than when I decide to invite her back in?” Miranda simply asked eyes slight wide at the possible negative implication. Will simply shook his head as he took a thoughtful bite of his last portion of the pork neck before answering the question. While Hannibal hid the little twang of joy that traveled over him, knowing that his words possibly caused some worry for the woman.

“I wouldn’t use the word worried,” Will began after his swallow.

“Perhaps cautious.” Hannibal offered looking over towards Will, with slightly raised eyebrows and opened features. Waiting for Will to either agree or disagree with his offering. Though he already knew that Will would agree with his word choice as soon as he spoke it.

“Possibly.” Will seemed to not have minded the sudden jump in, or noticed the way Miranda’s eyes slightly narrowed towards the sudden connection that Hannibal was building in the topic. Clearly seeing what Hannibal was blaringly flaunting for her. “But it might be best to set some strong ground rules, she won’t fight the rules you’ll set, she’ll follow them to extent of her abilities. Brittney will want to be back in your graces. So striking at her Achilles tendon will more than likely be the best option to help handle the issue. But also think about looking for a new assistant in the near future if things do turn for the more obsessive side.”

Miranda quickly changed her look as soon as Will’s eyes flicked up to her and she slowly nodded her head, making it clear she was taking in Will’s well placed advise. “Alright I’ll keep that in mind when the time comes. But why don’t we change the topic,” Miranda breathed as she clasped her hands together, “because I happened to bring something back from the golden state that I cannot wait to give you.” Miranda smiled.

“Miranda, we talked about the gift issue.” Will sighed placing down his utensils once more, with a tired yet fond look on his face and Miranda let out a light chuckle.

“Yes, I know you wanted me to stop buying you gifts for the time being, but you never said anything about your dogs.” Miranda teased as she leaned forward in her chair, clear that what negative emotion that had infected her prior was now properly handled. Will looked taken back and Hannibal found the hairs on the back of his neck begin to prickle. Of course Miranda had found, yet another way to worm herself into Will’s heart and chose to abuse the aspect. Another ploy that Hannibal himself hid away to use as a tactic when the time might call for it.

“I bet they will enjoy whatever this gift is when you give it to them when you come over this Saturday.” Will smiled.

"I bet they will sweetheart." Miranda all but cooed as she rested her chin on her hands.

"You two plan on spending the weekend together?" Hannibal asked as he inserted himself back into the conversation. In order to gain any possible information along with slaying any romantic tension that wanted to be born. Reminding the two that they were in the company of another being and not on some *date*.

"Why yes," Miranda turned her attention towards the doctor, with a look that seemed all to please to reveal the weekend plans that they planned. "Will wants to take me fishing this weekend and he informed me of this little clearing just on the outskirts of his house." Miranda turned back to Will with a soft smile. "The perfect spot for a romantic outing."

"Really, you don't strike me as the type to partake in such an activity." Hannibal observed, edges slowly hardening and composer slowly fading into dangerous levels.

"Well, you're not wrong," Miranda chuckled as she placed her hands in her lap as she turned to Hannibal once more, "but it's something that Will enjoys doing and I'm glad he wants to share the experience with me." Hannibal bit the inside of his cheek as he recovered from, yet another low blow sent his way. He should have prepared himself, knowing that Miranda liked to play dirty and strike at weak points. She found a small weakness in him and though she was somewhat playing nice during their time together, throwing small little hits that were easy to dodge. Miranda still had the ability to lash out when provoked and she just remined him where she knew to strike.

Watch yourself Rhettford, or it might be your tongue that'll be served next on this table of mine, along with other parts that I find worthy of my skills. Who knows maybe I'll invite dear Will to partake in the feast that your flesh can provide.

"Now that the meal is done, I also took great pleasure in making us a dessert to enjoy." Hannibal announced after another lull of silence as the main course finally came to an end, as he stood to clear the table.

"Oh, and what pray tell will that be?" Miranda asked with a friendly smile.

"It will be an apple celeriac cake that has been lightly cooked on the grill that way the sugars are caramelized and provides a subtle smokey taste. It is also topped with homemade apple ice-cream and drizzled in a bourbon butterscotch sauce." Hannibal informed as he picked up the plates, noticing how Will reached, in a way to make sure the other had everything under control. Feeding the slight need to be of assistance anyway he could during Hannibal's play of being host.

"Well if it is anything like the meal you made, there is no doubt that it'll be heavenly." Miranda beamed and the artificial sweetness the coated the complement made Hannibal's teeth ache. The feeling chased him after he left the area in favor of the kitchen, needing to realign himself, check for any possible tears in his person suit. Before he submitted himself to possibly another hour or so in the presence of the woman, reminding himself as he prepared to dress the plates with dessert, of it being his doing that had Miranda in his space. He hated the feeling, the seeping hardening boil that coated each joint of his being. Cracking

with each flex of his muscle, each spill of words, and shift of his mask, Hannibal had to remind himself to play nice while in one of their presences.

Hannibal was just finishing drizzling the butterscotch sauce on the second plate, when his ears caught a slightly annoying jingle that clashed rudely with the soft music that had been feeding the dining room. The sudden interjection caused Hannibal to faulter and pause in the task, drawing his attention away from the plate as he moved over to the doorway. Catching the interruption of the ring tone and Miranda's professional greeting.

"I'm sorry sweetheart, please excuse me." Hannibal caught the sound of a chair being pushed back and the sound of well-priced heels clicking on the floor. He waited a few moments, before walking back into the room with a well-formed perplexed look. Will had his attention pointed to the direction Miranda had walked off in, slowly turning away when he noticed that Hannibal had entered the room a few seconds later. Before he could answer the clear question that painted the other's face Miranda quickly walked back in, her phone in hand and an unamused look on her face as she looked down at the device. She let out a sigh and looked up at the two with a disappointed look on her face. "I hate having to do this to you Hannibal, but we need to cut this evening short."

"Why is that?" Will asked as he slowly stood up.

"With Brittney no longer working, I had to take up a lot of her duties for the time being and one of my suppliers, who lives in another time zone." Miranda let out a dry chuckle of disbelief at the statement. "Is in need of a few important files to help complete an order that I had absentmindedly forgotten to send over." Miranda turned over to face Hannibal, a clear apologetic look expertly painted her features. "I am so sorry for having to cut the evening like this, it was not my intention in the slightest."

Liar. Hannibal hissed as he fought not to narrow his eyes towards her, but quickly gathered the roaring emotion that traveled up his chest, thrashed at his mouth, and pulled at his muscles. Pleading to be used in some sort of way, whether that be physical action or sharpened words. Hannibal took a deep breath through his nose, gathering the thrashing emotion and concealing it in a deep place. Where it could not get out of hand and simmer into submission.

"It's perfectly understandable," Hannibal finally spoke, "these issues are expected to come up especially towards someone in your field of work. I just hope everything works out." Hannibal was surprised with himself when he managed to produce a calm reassuring smile to match the blatant falseness of the sentence he said.

"I'm glad you understand." Miranda's face softened at the reassurance another well placed mask, before she turned to Will, "I hope you understand too Will."

"It's alright, as Hannibal said it comes with the job." Will simply shrugged, a part of him was somewhat glad that the evening was coming to a faster close than initially planned. He felt his social batteries draining, with each press of utensils and dip in conversation. Along with every shift in the mood that seemed to feel like a roller coaster with every dip and rise that passed around the table. As if it was another side to be placed on their dish, another part of the meal that was ment to be feasted upon. He wasn't going to deny the knowledge of the

heavy tension that sat as an extra guest at the table during the meal, he felt like he was the only who was seeing it and actually making a mental note of the invisible being.

While Miranda and Hannibal seemed to circle one another in their words and body language, clear they were challenging each other. Will felt a distaste towards the two's act of hidden rivalry, along with a bit offended that they thought they were able to do it under his nose in the first place. It was clear the two would butt heads, they had almost identical personalities and while some would believe that would mix well, all it did was bring in the need for a challenge. To poke and proud, trying to find fault in something the other believed was faultless when they acknowledged it being a part of their being. Will was just surprised they both managed to be a tad bit civilized, though he could feel that ground that they occupied begin to shake and crack with every passage of time. Will could see something was bound to shift at any moment. So, the sudden call felt like an unwarranted gift, an excuse to leave the simmering hostile situation, that flashed its pointed teeth and clicked its claws at the dinner table.

"I knew you'd understand." Miranda smiled at Will before her eyes traveled over towards Hannibal. Where the man caught the shift in her eyes and the slow release of venom that entered that once sweet smile. Turning it hard and toxic, made only for Hannibal's eyes and his eyes alone.

"Tonight's event was very interesting." Miranda commented as they made their way up her steps and towards the welcoming blue door.

"You could say that." Will sighed, stretching his lungs, that had felt heavily squeezed ever since the diner. Now being opened thanks to the outdoors and rejuvenating air as he followed behind Miranda, hands shoved in his slack pockets. "Can't help, but feel a bit bad for having to leave Lecter's house so abruptly though." Will spoke as he fought back the unwanted guilt that tried to appear inside his stomach.

"Don't be," Miranda waved dismissably as she turned to unlock her door, "there was a very reasonable reason for our departure." The door clicked and Miranda turned to Will with a devilish smile. "Oh, so he thinks." Will looked at Miranda with disbelief, before he let out a chuff of air and a shake of his head.

"And what is that supposed to mean?" He chuckled as he removed his hands from his pockets and placed them to sit on his hips.

"Let's say that I didn't really need to come home so quickly after all." Miranda stepped over towards Will, reaching out to play with the lapel of his coat. Her eyes flicked upwards to meet his gaze and Will caught the glimpse of something coy and seductive. "Why don't you come in for a while, share a drink and some more time together." Miranda's hand left Will's coat and she traced the underside of his jaw with one of her fingers, her nail slightly scratching his skin, leaving a shutter of flesh behind the warm touch. "We haven't exactly been alone for six long days after all," her eyes no longer on him, but her thumb that had reached up and slid lightly over Will's bottom lip and he felt his heart slowly rise into his throat with each light provocative touch. "And I've missed you terribly." She whispered eyes flashing away from her appendages as she leaned in. Teasing Will with the idea of a kiss, before pulling away and walking over to the door. "So what do you say sweetheart to a little

nightcap." She looked over her shoulder, her eyes traveling over Will's figure, before locking in on him once more. Showing him the beckoning need they held for him, before she walked inside the large house, not waiting for Will to voice his answer.

God who have I gotten myself involved with. Will found himself once again thinking, with a smirk and another shake of his head before he followed Miranda inside.

Chapter End Notes

Hmmm I wonder what lies beyond that door for dear Will. Guess we'll just have to see in the next chapter. ;)

The Minx and The Mongoose

Chapter Summary

After the unexpected reunion and the tension filled dinner party at Hannibal's. Will and Miranda are finally given some time alone together.

Chapter Notes

Yeah you see those spicy tags up at the top those come into play in this chapter as well. A heads up this is my first time writing spicy content so that should be a warning in itself hahaha... But I did do a lot of research into how to properly write something like this as I didn't want to use cliched words or actions. Along with other research to help write the scene as well.... so yeah now I have that knowledge floating around in my head. But what was out there was somewhat helpful and at the same time not at all. So when trying to figure out how to write something like that yourself you will run into repeating advise, but advise none the less.
Also this is like the only chapter so far that is simply just Will and Miranda, no other character is present in this chapter.

Enjoy the chapter :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will once more found himself slowly wondering the large area that was Miranda's living room, the electric chandelier giving off a warm light that played well with the soft ember glow that the remote-controlled fireplace offered to its residence. Instead of stopping by the large arched windows like the first time he had entered the room; who knows what he might feel when he decided to glance outside into the beckoning night. Will found himself standing in front of the bookshelf. Eyes scanning whatever it might hold. He noticed the small number of knickknacks that sat on the shelves; all different from one another, some were figurines like an overly round ceramic sparrow and others were simple vases. All placed next to rows of hard cover books that Will had never heard of, but he did notice the genre that those books resided in. They shared the world of romance, Will was amused at the realization, though he could now see Miranda as a romantic he could never picture her sitting down; nestled in the luxury chair, legs tucked underneath her with a glass of rich whisky in one hand, to read one of those books. She always seemed like the kind of person who would scoff at the idea of a whirl wind romance. But that had him thinking, didn't what they share be consider a whirl wind romance, or land somewhere in the broad topic when discussed about. Hell he recalled telling Beverly how he and Miranda had met, because that was one of the first question she asked. Wanting to know how he found himself with the upcoming date when he radiated

‘please leave me alone’ aura nearly twenty-four seven and she couldn’t stop the chuckle that slipped passed her lips when he told her about the coffee shop interaction.

“I’m sorry,” Beverly held up her hand as she tried to conceal her amusement, while Will crossed his arms and tried not to roll his eyes. “It’s just what you described sounds like something from one those cliched Hallmark movies. Next thing you know, she’ll be telling you how she has to leave for a while to go help her parents in some small middle of nowhere town with their Christmas tree farm or something like that.” At that point Beverly had given up on trying to hold back her chuckles. They even seemed to grow when she noticed the face Will was sending her way.

But the more he thought about it back then the more the encounter did sound like something someone might watch. When they landed on one of those channels that played nothing, but cheesy romance movies on a nearly daily basis. Only to throw in an old sitcom now and then to help refresh the views mind or draw in new ones. Will never considered himself to be one of those people, who found entertainment in the genre of romantic entertainment. Which was even more odd since now he had found himself falling face first into that world, that Miranda seemed to know so much about. While Will once again only played visitor in more often than not. Though thanks to Miranda he might be able to give himself the tittle of residence.

The soft rising sound of jazz trinkled into the large room, the introduction of music was enough to draw Will out of his thoughts and away from the path of memory lane. He blinked a few times, before he turned himself away from the bookshelf. Realizing that if Miranda asked him about any one of the titles that one of those books held, he would not be able to answer her question. When he turned away from the tall bookshelf, he was met with Miranda standing by the fire place, with that thin remote in hand and for a split-second Will felt like he was thrown back in time. To the first time he had entered Miranda’s house, guided to the living room, where he would wait for her to return to him. Yet though he felt the inkling feeling of déjà vu, Will also felt the contrast to that night, especially in himself. Back to the first time he stepped foot into the house, where he argued with himself about whether or not he made the right choice, this time when he had followed Miranda inside, he felt certain that he had made the correct choice.

“I thought some nice music might help us unwind after that eventful dinner we had at Lecter’s.” Miranda said with a loose shrug as she began to flip through the playlist of songs, trying to find something that might help lighten the mood.

“Yeah, that dinner was very eventful you can say,” Will rubbed the back of his head. The thick tension still pressing in the back of his mind. Trying to crawl to the forefront and make itself the main topic. “I just hope that it’ll help ease the tension between you two and we can move forward from all this.”

Miranda hummed in agreement, still focused on the slim remote in hand, still looking for that right song. “I couldn’t agree more, but let’s face it the tension there was so thick one could cut it with a knife.”

“The water’s still rough, the waves are choppy, but it looks like there might be signs of settling. Showing signs that it won’t pull us down when we step in.”

“I’m glad you can see it,” Miranda sighed, it felt perplexing to be the optimistic one to Will. He was so used to seeing only the negative. That’s what he was paid to do. So to be put on the other end of the spectrum it made the man feel uneven, he was standing in an unfamiliar territory and was trying to feel his way through. “I hope that means you accepted my apology than, since you keep talking about moving forward.” Miranda lifted her gaze and raised an eyebrow played with a hopeful smirk.

Will searched himself, did he accept the apology Miranda had been pushing on him since their reunion, once again finding himself split in two. In one hand he felt himself ready to move one, leave it all behind, forget about it and bury the hatchet. He felt this new feeling of optimism singing out to him like a hopeful song bird welcoming spring. In the other though was that slight slithering feeling of not exactly anger, but something close to it. It was a feeling that wanted to be more, to be nourished until it came to full maturity, but did Will really want that. It honestly felt too mentally draining to put any attention into that feeling. Maybe he was ready to accept Miranda’s apology after all.

“I suppose it is.” Will smiled softly and he watched as Miranda perked up on the spot, her smile stretching out even more than before.

“I’m really glad to hear that.” Miranda finally stopped fiddling with the remote and it had Will wondering if the reason she was so intent on filtering through the near endless number of songs, was because she was trying to find her way through the conversation. He watched as she placed the remote on the fireplace mantel next to two half-filled tumblers.

I wonder what else that remote might control, Will mused as he began to walk over to Miranda, letting the thrum of a well-tuned bass match tempo with his pulse, *the lights perhaps, or maybe some hidden compartment.* Will couldn’t help the chuckle that slipped passed his lips at the ridiculous thought, causing Miranda to tilt her head curiously.

“And what’s so funny?”

“Nothing, I was just musing over what else that little remote can do.” Will loosely pointed to the remote and Miranda followed the direction, before turning back to him.

“Well if you’re wondering if there might be some hidden doorway that might pop open at the press of a button,” Miranda let out a light laugh, “then I’m sorry to disappoint you.” Miranda smirked as she reached over to the tumblers and handed one to Will. Their fingers brushing over slightly, enough connection for Will to feel an electric pull traveling through his hand.

“I don’t think that’s possible,” Will said as he looked down at the glass, the amber liquid nestled in it was lighter than the first glass that Miranda had given him. Instead of swallowing the electric light like the Glenmorangie Signet, this one played with it. Held it in its warm golden hue and danced with each shift, each sway. A dancer and its partner existing as one. He lifted the glass up closer and caught the small sweet scent of honey emerging from the drink. “You disappointing me that is.” Will added as he looked up from the glass, catching the soft look Miranda was giving him. Her lips slightly parted, eyes a bit wide and Will noticed a slight flush traveling over her soft round cheek bones. She looked so vulnerable, so taken back by such a simple sentence. It caught Will off guard and by how Miranda looked it had done the same for her. *What have I done, did I say something wrong,*

did I say something right? Shit Graham make up your mind, reach out and try to decipher it, use that ever sought out empathy of yours! Will thought with near panic. *No I can't, I won't! That'll be an invasion of privacy, if Miranda wants to share her emotions with me, then I will let her. I won't go prodding around in her head like how others like to do with mine.*

Miranda turned and placed the glass back on the mantel and took a deep breath. Ducking her head slightly, obscuring her features from Will. "Do you want to dance?" Miranda whispered and if it wasn't for the lull in the song Will might not have heard her.

"Pardon?" Will took a slight step forward, as though the ground was cracked and was on the verge of collapsing. He had to make sure he understood what Miranda wanted, maybe even needed of him. It also had him wondering how much he had managed to fuck up with a simple statement.

"It's just," Miranda let out a sigh and looked over at Will, with a soft shy smile. A smile Will had never seen Miranda make, all her facial expressions always seemed precise, certain they had an aura of confidence held inside. Well maintained and known. This one was the complete opposite; this smile was never used. Never shown to someone, never brought to the surface. It was locked away and left forgotten. Though Will was often given genuine smiles from Miranda. This one poured it like a raging river and Will was in its path. "We never danced before and with the music," Miranda gestured aimlessly, "I thought it might be nice to be close to you."

Will placed his glass next to its partner; where they would stay forgotten by the two. He then extended his arm for Miranda to take and she reached over for the offering and gently took it. Her warm touch held in his hand, as he pulled her close to him. Their bodies flushed together, pressed chest to chest, and both their own warmth that reached out for another grew closer to their need for the other. To conjoin and become one. Will's free arm wrapped itself around Miranda's waist and Miranda's free arm found it's place on Will's shoulder, as the two slowly began to pick apart a rhythm they could follow with the guide of the music.

Taking light steps forwards and backwards, following the others, as they held one another close, letting the light sound of the instruments voice pull at them, surround them. It filled in the emptiness as though it was a being in the room. It ate at silence that was born because neither Will nor Miranda spoke to one another. They just followed the rhythm and fell into the peace of watching one another. Eyes tracing over every possible detail that might have been hidden from them before, that could now only be seen do to their close soft proximity. Words were not needed at the moment, only the others hold, only the others presence. Will held the lead in the dance and found no resistance from Miranda, giving off the impression that she did not want it. Instead she wanted to just have the luxury of following, letting her mind settle and let everything be made for her. As she followed Will's movements in the small turns and the gentle sways that the music laid out for him to feel.

Miranda leaned in and rested her head on Will's shoulder, nestling in and he felt her let out a much-needed sigh. Her warm breath brushing up against his neck as he felt her melt into his hold. *I wonder how much she holds together for others,* Will looked down and noticed Miranda's eyes closed and her face once more, soft and opened. *How often does she feel like she needs to present herself as someone strong, uneasily knocked down, unwilling to give in*

when challenged. You must get tired of always holding yourself together. I know the feeling of always being aware of the eyes that linger far too long on you when they don't think you notice. Expecting you to be one aspect all the time, to the point that it's all you know how to present yourself as. Until you start to question if that's all there is of you in the first place. Will slowly turned them with the thrumming of a cello that called back to the bass guitar; a conversation only the two stringed instruments held for one another. Will looked up from Miranda and noticed their reflection in the far window. The fire painting their skin with its warm glow, as they swayed loosely to the music. They painted such a normal scene, it felt wrong to him to be a part of it. He almost expected it to shatter at any moment, to watch as the glass exploded into sharp jagged pieces and fly out to cut them. All because they looked so normal held in one another's grasp. Will's eyes slowly began to close as he found himself becoming lost in the soft song and softer motion they performed. He soon found himself leaning his head to the side to rest on top of Miranda's. Catching her warm perfume and the tropical scent of her shampoo, he even noticed the small hum the Miranda let out when he nestled into her.

"This is nice," Miranda spoke after a few moments, for the first time ever since they started their dance, drawing Will out of his thoughts as he leaned away from Miranda to look down at her. "You and me like this." Her eyes fluttered open as she peered up at him through dark lashes. "No one from the outside world," Miranda nudged her head closer to Will's neck and pressed light kisses against the exposed skin. Sending an airy flutter throughout his body, that slowly mixed with the newly thawed blossom that made his chest it's garden. "You," a light kiss, "and me," a longer kiss, "just the two of us." Miranda pulled herself off of Will's shoulder. "Together." She whispered as she lightly kissed Will's lips.

"It is nice isn't it." Will's voice matched the softness in Miranda's as he leaned forward to captured her ever teasing lips with his own. Feeling the soft press of Miranda as she leaned into the kiss, her hand left Will's shoulder and placed it on the side of his face. Will used the light hold on Miranda's waist to pull her closer, feeling her soft body press against him, he tilted his head slightly to the side. As they deepened the kiss, mouths opening for one another, finding a new rhythm that the music could not provide. Chasing movements the other's performed, trying to find out who was leading who around as they slowly reached out to each other. Something slowly began to build, something that hadn't reared its head for a while, that wanted to be born in that exact same spot weeks ago.

Miranda let go of Will's hand, so she could hold the other side of Will's face and pulled him closer to her, in an almost desperate need to deepen the already extensive kiss. Will felt as Miranda's tongue flick at the roof of his mouth sending an electric tingle through his body. He didn't hesitate to return the action with his own tongue, breathing in the moan that Miranda breathed out caused by the brush of his tongue. With his newly freed hand Will placed it to the side of her face, his thumb gently rubbing her cheek. A small hum escaped Miranda's mouth at the soft feeling, before Will felt Miranda tease his bottom lip with the idea of her teeth biting down. But that didn't stop Will from tightening his hold on Miranda's waist, feeling her flesh give under his hold as he answered the tease with his own, sucking at Miranda's bottom lip in return. Pulling it in and lightly biting down on the plush flesh, a soft moan escaped from Miranda, caused by the action she only hinted at doing. Slowly Miranda began to lift her leg and rub it along Will's, sending a small ripple with each brush from the playful appendage. Will abandoned the hold he had on her waist in favor of grasping her

thigh, his fingers digging into the tender flesh. Holding her leg up into one spot, so it strained against the fabric of her dress and almost straddled his hip.

In return to the sudden shift and restriction, Miranda let go of Will's face and hooked her arms around his neck. Another act of trying to pull Will incredibly close, it was near impossible for the two to become anymore pressed together, but it felt as though Miranda was trying to prove the feeling wrong. The new stance opened up a pressing warmth emanating off of Miranda as she moved her hips and ground against Will. Sending heavy sparks throughout his body, with every rub of her crotch against his. He felt the spark attempting to strike up a fire in his stomach, that would have the embers of the flame flutter downward and start an even more physical reaction to Miranda's action. Soon Will felt himself returning the call for a more physical movement besides the way they held onto each other and the way they explored the other's mouth. Will's hand left holding Miranda's thigh and began to slowly travel up her leg, tracing her concealed flesh with a light skim of his palm. Until it came to rest of the curve of her rear, where it stayed for the time being. One of Miranda's arms unhooked themselves from around Will's neck and sensually slid down his neck, to his shoulder, only stopping at his chest. Where her fingers began to play with one of the buttons of his dress shirt.

"I believe," Miranda breathed out as they pulled away from each other, taking in panting breaths and freezing their movements. Will opened his eyes looking over at Miranda, with half lidded eyes as his mind slowly came back to him, no longer blindly losing itself in the building presence of Miranda's and his attraction. "We should continue this dance of ours in the bedroom," Miranda continued, still looking down at Will's chest, almost transfixed on the stubborn button that would not come undone by just one hand. Before her eyes flashed up to meet his and a smile spread across her face, her once perfectly applied lipstick smudge and Will was certain his mouth was the reason why. "What do you think?"

Will gently took the hand that still played with his button and raised it to his mouth. He felt Miranda's eyes on him as he turned over her hand, so it was palm up and laid a long kiss on the heel. He felt her pulse jump at the action; the fluttering of a heartbeat danced under his touch. Before his attention flicked up from the appendages and over to its owner. Where her wide eyes were nearly lost towards the seductive response.

"Lead the way." Will's voice low and with his consent, Miranda took him by the hand and began to lead him out of the living room. The only room Will had ever been in at this point and now he was being led to her bedroom. He could feel his pulse begin to quicken at the possibility on what lies in their future. Miranda abruptly stopped when they reached the towering stairs, stepping on only one of the steps, before going still. Will stood motionless and let his eyes roam over Miranda's statue like body. Questioning if Miranda was starting to have second thoughts on actually inviting him up to her room, her private space. Which he would understand, though he was somewhat of a sexual being in his youth with the few partners that he found in his orbit, he understood hesitation and rethinking. He had been on both sides, with either a partner who realized they might be moving too fast, or no longer interested. Or where he felt too raw for the act, like he was being used for just pleasure and nothing else, that or perhaps the person who wanted to get him into their bed wasn't the right person after all. Either way if Miranda wanted to stop, he would and not hold it against her.

They would simply restart the evening and go back to the living room if that was what she wanted and perhaps simply cuddle on the couch.

“Miranda,” Will spoke as he took room on the space next to her, standing by her side, “if you changed your mind, I understand. We don’t have to do anything you don’t want to.” He spoke voice soft and assuring as he reached over and rubbed her shoulder gently. He watched as she blinked a few times, his words sinking into her mind. As the last of his words were fully submerged was when Miranda abruptly turned to face him and Will could have sworn, he saw something travel across her eyes, it was similar to the way water shimmers in the sun when its surface is disturbed. Instead of an answer like he expected, where Miranda would tell him what thoughts were passing though her head, she instead acted. Pushing herself against him, the unexpected collision had Will stumbling backwards, the only thing stopping him from falling on his ass was the banister. Which dug into his back as Miranda connected her lips with his, in an almost fevered kiss, a kiss that poured an unruly emotion of passion and it flooded his other senses. Over riding his mind with its unbearable heat and scorching his nerve points in its lava flow. He raised his hands and took of hold of both of Miranda’s arm, trying to stabilize himself and keep her from fully accidently pushing him over the railing. After a few heart thumping moments, Miranda pulled away from him. Leaving his lips feeling nearly raw and still warm from her touch.

“You always seem to know the right thing to say,” Miranda breathed out after taking a reassuring breath. Will watched as Miranda took his hand and rubbed her thumb over his knuckle, it was another tale of hers, often doing the action while she tried to realign her thoughts. If she needed to do it to stabilize her feelings, then Will was more than willing to let her do so, even if she rubbed his knuckles down to the bone. She looked up at him with a reassuring smile letting Will know that she had come to a conclusion on what she wanted. “Come, the bedroom isn’t that far.” Her reassuring smile sharpened and revealed just the right amount of perfectly white teeth and all Will could do was arch an eyebrow, before he was once again led up the stairs and towards her bedroom.

Miranda stepped into the lowly lit room, still holding onto Will’s hand, he noticed the cushion under his steps, thanks to the plush cream shag carpet. Miranda finally released Will’s hand after leading him over to the center of the room in front of her queen size bed. He took in the large bed and the champagne curtains that elegantly hung off the bed’s canopy, he found himself fighting off the urge to reach out and caress the sheer fabric. Turning his attention away from the fabric and towards the rest of the bedroom. The space was dressed in soft warm colors, compared to the rest of her house. Where other rooms were covered in the pure colors of gold and white, her bedroom was filled with cream and champagne. The room was large, but the well-placed furniture helped fill out the space. There was a plush love seat that sat by two glass doors that lead to a small balcony. Will couldn’t help the image of Miranda standing outside on the balcony taking in either the cool night air or the gentle warmth of the morning sun, copying the stance he often took when he would stand outside on his own porch.

Miranda captured Will’s attention, when he felt her reach out and try to unbutton his shirt once more. Will found himself simply watching as her well-manicured fingers fiddled with the dark buttons, before he reached up to help her with her task of removing his shirt. Only to stop once his shirt was completely opened, putting his bare chest on display for Miranda’s

viewing. He watched as she reached out and began to caress the exposed flesh, with feather like touches. Will sucked in a breath when he felt her warm touch over his skin and the feeling of goosebumps in the wake as she continued to explore. Her eyes never leaving his front as her hands roamed over his chest, slipping into his shirt, he felt her fingers brush over one of his pecks, ghosting over a nipple, before sliding down to the plane of his sides. Her hands slid upwards until they reached his shoulders and Will felt as his shirt slid off of him. With Miranda's and his guide, to gather on the floor by his feet, truly exposing his upper half. He felt his skin prickle at the full air of the room, but it soon settled thanks to the return of Miranda's curious touches.

Will began to feel the need to touch Miranda, to run his own fingers over her flesh, to feel it's reaction to his own touch, like how she was touching him, but unlike himself she was still fully dressed. So he worked with what he could and reached out to caress her face, breaking whatever trance she must have fallen into. Miranda leaned her head into his palm, eyes closed as she nestled her cheek into his palm. Turning her head slightly and Will watched almost mesmerized as she took his thumb into her mouth. A hot tingle traveled down his hand, down his arm, and nearly exploded into his body. When his thumb was taken into her hot wet mouth, teeth teasingly scrapping against his skin, he felt her tongue lick and coat his thumb, he couldn't help the shutter of a breath that came from him just by the lustful teasing action. Miranda's eyes fluttered open as she released Will's thumb from her mouth. She leaned forward, for a second Will thought he was going to be met with a kiss, but Miranda leaned over his shoulder and towards his ear.

"Care to help me undress." She whispered followed by her lightly biting Will's earlobe. A shiver ran down his spine at the bite and Miranda pulled away with a provocative smile. He watched as she sultrily turned around, looking over her shoulder as she revealed her back towards him. Waiting for Will to assist her in releasing herself from the body contouring dress. With a steady hand Will took the small black zipper between his fingers and steadily let the zipper slide down its track, revealing Miranda's skin in it's decent. He only stopped when the zipper reached its end, the curve of her lower back right above her butt. Will took in the sight of the promised flesh, the way it peaked out of the opening, he reached out with a near hesitant hand and began to mimic the way Miranda had touched his chest. His fingers grazing over her smooth skin and he felt the way her skin twitched at his touch, before settling, nearly melting under it. Miranda let out a breath much like he did, her head lulled back to the point where her hair brushed against him. Her skin felt so warm it ingulfed his touch as he continued to brush over it, blindly feeling the naked curve of her body, roaming upward to where he felt the laced wing of her bra. "Are you going to help me, or do I need to take it from here." Miranda teased looking over her should with a smirk, Will matched that smirk and cocked an eyebrow.

"I don't know," Will traced over the black laced bra until he came to the back and ran his nail over the hard hooks. "Why don't you tell me." He whispered close to Miranda's ear before gingerly biting her earlobe, Miranda let out a small moan thanks to the action. Her head lulling to the side, into Will's bite.

"I could use your assistance *Professor* Graham." Miranda purred and Will felt a shot of arousal travel straight below his belt. For a split second he found himself fighting against his restraint and question why the sudden use of a title had such an effect on him. But his

thoughts were interrupted when Miranda turned her head fully after Will let go and gave him a few quick pecks, before leaving Will to continue to undress her. Will looked over Miranda's face her eyes closed and mouth slightly opened as she waited for his response. Instead of uttering a single word Will raised his hands from her bra and moved them up to her shoulders. Taking her dress under his hands and helped Miranda out of the fabric, he watched as the near red dress descended down her body, exposing more of herself to his view. Until it piled onto the floor at her feet, Will looked up from the bundle of burgundy to take in fully of Miranda's near bare state as she stepped out of the puddle. It would be considered a lie if he wasn't slightly taken back by the sight, sucking in a breath at her almost naked beauty. He was also a bit taken by surprise when he noticed the only thing that still covered her fully was just the singular article of clothing; her laced bra. Miranda must have felt Will's wonder, for she looked over her shoulder once more with a devious twinkle in her eyes and a coy smile. Before turning back around and waited for him to continue to free her from the undergarment. Will did not hesitate to finish the act.

Now fully free from the confines of all her clothes, Miranda turned and stood in front of him. All of her on display for only his eyes to gaze upon, her long hair falling lightly to cover her chest, a natural sensor bar. The rest of her was *completely* bare and she watched as Will's eyes took all of her in for the first time. Looking at her Will felt the lustful pull to close the distance between them. To take in all of her in his hands, in his mind, and melt together as one. He felt his heartbeat pick up at the mere image of them finally coming together and he felt his arousal begin to fully build in him as the image grew close to becoming a reality. Will began to walk over to Miranda, reaching out to lose his hand in her hair as he placed his hand behind her head and pulled her in for another strong lust pumping kiss. A heat filled rush collided within him when Miranda's naked chest pressed fully against his own, their naked skin connecting together, slightly rubbing as Miranda once more began to grind against his hold and Will found himself answering her with his own movements.

Miranda was the first to break their kiss, as she slowly stepped away from Will's hold and walked over to the foot of the bed. He watched as she elegantly crawled over the mattress. The way the mattress dipped under her weight, the way the cream and champagne cover bundled together under her hands and knees, and how her skin tightened with each stretched of movement. Will knew she was putting on a show for him and he found himself enjoying the performance. As she came to the head of the bed and propped herself up against the headboard, the many pillows nearly engulfed her form, one of her legs completed extended the other bent upward, giving Will a slight view of what awaited him. Miranda smiled, raised her hand, and beckoned Will over with her finger. At the request he began to undo his belt and began to slid off the rest of his clothes, only stopping in his tracks when the reality of the situation came fully around. When Will hesitated to pull down his boxer-briefs Miranda raised her eyebrow and tilted her head slightly.

"Is something wrong?" She asked and Will let out a chuff laugh not looking up at her, as he found a way to word the answer to her question.

"I uh," Will licked his lips, still feeling the warmth and rawness left from Miranda. "Don't have any protection, do you?" He finally asked, Will didn't want to risk anything when it finally came to him and Miranda sharing their building arousal for one another and he was already a walking reminder that the pull-out method was not fool proof. Miranda smiled

fondly at the simple question and gestured lightly with her head over to her bedside drawer. Will stepped out of the bundle of pants, shoes and socks and walked over to the drawer. Feeling Miranda's eyes on him, taking in all of his movements similar to the way he had when she crawled onto the bed. He pulled open the small draw and was met with a never opened box of condoms sitting inside next to other objects that could help fill out any lust dripping mood that entered the bedroom.

After fully completing the act of getting ready, slipping off his last shred of clothing and slipping on the rubber. Will began to crawl onto the bed, feeling it's soft comforter dip under his weight as he joined Miranda, where she waited patiently for him. Will moved over to her and as soon as he was in arms reach, Miranda wrapped her arms around him and pulled him on top of her. Caging her body beneath him, Will quickly braced himself so he wouldn't completely fall on her as she pulled him into another searing kiss. Will slowly lowered his body as Miranda raised hers, connecting their bare chest together once more in the soft grind. Will felt her hands softly rub up and down his back, nails slightly scrapping his skin. Not deep enough to cause pain, but enough pressure to send out signals, while one of her legs attempted to hook themselves around his waist. As she tried to pull him down fully on top of her, but Will fought the pressure that she was pushing onto him. Will and Miranda were building together, bring their attraction to life in the subtly movements, they fed each other, with each soft grinds, meeting of their lips, and roaming touches. Neither in a rush to dive into the full sexual action, enjoying the rising heat that poured throughout one another.

Will for the first time that night separated himself from the entrapping kiss, already missing the heat from Miranda's mouth, he caught the breath escaping her lungs as he pulled away and began to lay gentle teasing kisses down her beautiful body. Starting at her cheek, moving under her jaw, Miranda tilted her head back to give him complete access as he trailed down her neck. Miranda sucked in a breath as Will's hands took both of her breasts. He began to kneed at the two peeks of delicate flesh. Miranda lifted her chest to meet his hot palms as he slowly massaged her, taking hold of both his wrist in her hands, giving a needy squeeze, keeping them there against her. Encouraging the movement as she subtly wanted him to continue with the attention, he was giving her breasts. Soon she released his wrist as he continued down her chest passed the cavern between her breast. His fingertips running over her ribs, dipping into the hollow curve underneath that appeared with each of her inhales. Now and again Will let the tip of his tongue slip past his lips to tease at her burning flesh as he crossed down her stomach and he felt her breath begin to pick up. Her arousal was humming out, reaching over towards him and his was returning its call.

"Will," Miranda breathed out, her voice nearly lost, Will stopped when he reached only a few inches above her pubic area. He looked up at Miranda, as she sat up on her forearms and she tilted her head. "What are you doing?" She asked, and the simple question seemed too perplexing for him, making him wonder if he was possibly about to take things too far.

"I wanted to treat you," Will answered, his voice soft and assuring, "like how you did for me the other night." He added with a sly smile.

"You really don't have to." Miranda said with soft eyes and a smile to match. It made Will wonder how many times something along these lines had ever happened to her. How many of her past partners had refused to go down on her or made her feel bad for wanting them to.

When she mentioned how they liked to take from her, did it also apply in the bedroom as well. Will never thought of himself as a greedy lover, often he preferred to give his partners as much pleasure as he could possibly give. He often thought it was because of his pure empathy. His own arousal over laid by his partner's. It often gave him what he needed maybe even more, which lead to him wanting to compensate for the feeling as best as he could.

Will smiled, "Miranda," the woman tilted her head as she watched with anticipating eyes as Will crawled back over top of her and placed a soft kiss to her lips, Miranda reached up to caress his face at the tender moment. Before Will pulled away and looked at her, meeting her gaze. "Let me *treat* you." Will replied with a small touch of husk lacing his words, he noticed the click in Miranda's eye as she recalled the origin of the sentence and a knowing smile painted her face.

"Alright." She whispered kissing Will once more, before he moved away from on top of her. Resetting himself between her legs, as Miranda returned to her previous position as well. Will rested one hand on her hip and took her right leg in his other. Where he bent it and began to lay opened kisses on her calf slowly moving upwards to the inside of her thigh, once in a while teasing the flesh with soft scrapes of his teeth. Miranda let out an airy breath at the sensation of Will's lips against the tenderness of her thigh. She took in a shuttering breath as he moved up her thigh, his other hand slowly massaging into her hip. When he was finished decorating the area with opened kisses, he hooked her leg over his shoulder as he adjusted himself between her sweltering legs, he could feel the heat from her arousal brushing lightly over him. Miranda sucked in a sharp breath as Will took her with his mouth, he caught how her back arched upward and he felt Miranda try to fight off the urge to bury the heel of her foot into his back. As he mouthed at her outer lips, before parting them with his fingers, he reached out with his tongue and slowly lapped upward. A small moan escaped her as he passed over her, his hot tongue mixing with her own wet heat as he continued to give her long slow strokes.

"Will," She moaned out, her hand reaching down, feeling for his and Will took her seeking hand in his entwining their fingers. "Higher." Will did as she directed as she parted her free leg, opening herself up even more to his giving mouth. His nose nuzzled at her clit, in an almost teasing manner and Miranda's grip tightened. Will raised himself and began to show her clit more attention. Slowly dancing around the bundle with his tongue, brushing over it, Miranda gripped his hand hard at the teasing. Will let out a hot puff of air, as he took her clit between his lips, sucking in, gently pulling the muscle lightly. Releasing slowly after, before using his tongue to lap over it, he felt Miranda stiffen slightly at the attention as she bucked her hips softly. Will took his free hand and began to rub up and down Miranda's bent leg that still rested on his shoulder. Cascading downward until he felt the soft flesh of her rear, where he gave her a gentle squeeze. Miranda shifted and he felt her fingers comb through his nearly sweat filled curls.

Miranda let out a soft breath as Will moved his attention away from her pulsing clit and once more began to stroke all of her with his tongue, long soft laps followed by quick short licks. Intertwining with flutters from his lips. Will would never say he was the best at giving oral, but he would never say he was all that bad at it either. He never really heard a complaint from his past partners, but then again, he never heard praise, it was a mix bag for him the more he thought about it. He relied on his senses when it came to his time in administrating oral

pleasure. Picking up on body movements, how someone might tense or relax under his care. How their breath might pick up in shallow inhales or completely deflate, he would listen for instructions between those changing breaths and follow them with the best intentions. He would glance up and search for facial expressions when not being watched, were their eyes closed, mouth slightly ajar in pleasure or did they have a face that twisted in discomfort? He took everything inconsideration when it came to the pleasure giving act.

“Oh!” Miranda sung as Will finally stopped lavishing her with licks and kisses and instead dove deeper into her. Penetrating her hot slick entrance with his tongue. He felt her hand tighten in his curls and the grip matched the other hand. Will in return squeezed the soft mound of flesh he was gripping. No longer was Miranda’s arousal humming instead it was full out bellowing, singing out for him and he felt his own begin to sing out too. Joining hers in their own lust pumping duet. He was beginning to sky rocket, building, and building. He felt himself straining against his own desire as he grew intensely hard at just the act of giving pleasure to Miranda alone. Now with her over pouring the strong erotic emotion it was near blinding for him, but he wanted to continue until Miranda either told him to stop, or until she reached her peak and she let him guide her through it.

“Right there!” Miranda nearly cried with more small bucks of her hips as Will continued with long deep presses followed by short quick ones, only breaking to give attention to her swollen clit. After the cry it didn’t take long for Will to feel Miranda’s muscle tense on him, her thighs quivered, back arched up, and she took in a sharp breath. He felt her clench around him, then slowly released with a few short pulses as she rode out her orgasm. Will slowly leaned away, as her hand untangled itself from his hair and her other hand slipped passed through his fingers. Will straightened himself taking Miranda’s thigh gently in his hands, peppering the quivering muscle with sweet kisses, caressing the malleable flesh as he kissed down her inner thigh and stopping at her calf muscle, guiding her down from her orgasm. He began to reverse his direction when he felt Miranda’s leg subtly slip away from his grasp, turning his attention away from the appendage and to the woman it belonged to. Miranda slid her leg back and slowly adjusted herself, to where she was on her hands and knees. Will watched as she began to crawl over to him, to meet him where he sat near the end of her bed. Not saying a single word to him as she grew close, with a look on her face that was near hypnotic, nearly sealing him to the spot with the want in her gaze.

Will quickly shook off the feeling as he soon mimicked her action. Adjusting himself on to his hands and knees and began to move over to her. Meeting her in the middle where he was met with a breaking kiss. Miranda took hold of the back of his head and pulled him close to her while Will did the same tangling his fingers in her thick hair. Miranda’s tongue slipped past his lips as she began to explore his mouth. An act Will was not completely used to being done to him after he was down giving oral. Most tried to avoided kissing him when he was done, often giving excuses of being too tired to continue, or wanting to try something else. Some would just rip the bandage off and flat out say it was simply disgusting. But not with Miranda, the way she was kissing him, her fiery full lips slit together with his and how her tongue slid fully next to his. It made Will feel wanted and he felt the same way towards Miranda. He wanted more of her and the feeling was slowly morphing into needing the more their lips stayed locked together. As if she was in his already expanding mind, Will let out a shuttering breath when he felt her fingers wrap around his cock and give a needed squeeze to it. He was already fighting the increasing build of pleasure since they began, fighting off the

intense erection that begged him to relieve the pressure as he made sure Miranda was given her own. Now with Miranda's hand slowly stroking his cock, it was becoming far more difficult to ignore the arousal a. The sharp electric spikes of pleasure that rippled through him as her hand slowly slid from hilt to tip in an even movement, causing his hard cock to strain inside the condom

"Miranda." His voice heavy as he broke their near suffocating kiss in favor of laying sucking kisses on to her heat-soaked neck. Miranda lulled her head back accepting the newly placed affection, Will felt her heavy heartbeat under his searching lips. He found himself gently nipping at the heavy pulse that sang through her jugular vein. Miranda's hand slowly drew away from his throbbing cock, no longer giving him slow pumps, no longer giving him ideas of release. Instead Miranda adjusted herself and Will soon found himself with his lap full of her radiant body. Miranda soon began to slightly push forward, causing Will to start to lean back onto the bed until he was fully on his back as the cushion of the mattress engulfed his weight. The first thought that came to his mind as he watched as Miranda began to adjust herself on top of him, where she straddled his waist, when he felt the full press of her weight on top of him. The thought was *control*. How Miranda even in the bedroom sought out to have it, even though she had given up some of the aspect when it came to him eating her out, she now sought to take some of it back. And Will was going to let her have it, if she wanted to take the reins when it finally came to them molding their bodies together, if it made her feel comfortable being in this position than who was he to deny her that pleasure.

Will watched as Miranda stared down at him with lust blown eyes as she once more took his cock in her hand and he let out a hiss at the contact. Fighting off the urge to buck his hips into the grip, instead he reached down and took the sides of her hips in his hands. Gripping onto the heated soft flesh, assisting Miranda as she raised herself onto her knees, he felt the muscles flex as she rose and aligned herself with his cock. Before slowly lowering herself onto him, at that moment when he felt the head of his cock greet her, he once again fought off the natural response to fully thrust his hips into her. Instead he held himself back and let her have the control that she wanted. Will felt himself slowly be engulfed into her slick velvet entrance inch by inch as she continued to lower herself on top of him. Will could not hold back the full moan that stampede up his throat and broke through his lips, as he arched his neck back and closed his eyes as he was taken into her thundering heat. He heard his moan entangle itself with Miranda's own vocal outburst as she steadily lowered herself onto him. Will slowly bent his knees upward to give Miranda something to lean back on as she fully came down on him, taking him whole. His grip on her hips tightened as Miranda gave a few experimental grinds, that sent small pulses of pleasure through him as he hoped it did for her as well.

Miranda, after circling her hips, sending out more pulses of pleasures that rocketed through Will's body. Began to lift herself off of him, feeling her slid off his cock, sent waves down him as he felt her heat pumping walls caress him. Before coming fully down on top of him turning those teasing electric signals into near thunder storms as she began to ride him fully. Lifting herself a few inches, before coming down, throwing in a few rocks of her hips to mix things up. Will soon found himself trying to match her movements every time Miranda came down on him, he would thrust his hips upwards. Bringing out a moan from her as he sought to bury himself deeper into her. Sought out to find that spot inside her that would give her the electric pleasure that she was giving him with each roll of her hips, with every lift of her

body. Bare skin connecting was the only sound that traveled through the room, once in a while a well-tuned moan would pass by, but it was the sound of sweat glistening skin connecting that stayed consistent. As the air grew heavy with their combined arousal.

Will couldn't help, but be memorized by the sight of Miranda. All of her on display on top of him as she sought out her own pleasure while delivering Will his own. The way the champaign sheer curtains casted a glow on her glistening skin. The way her head lulled back; her mouth slightly ajar in ecstasy. Her black hair cascading down her shoulders, like dark raging rivers rippling with every bounce she performed. The way she touched herself, her hands sliding along her body groping her own chest before running her hands through her hair. How her muscle flexed with each roll and every grind, Will could not help, but become lost in the sight. Watching her made the already hurdling feeling of ecstasy quicken its pace inside of him and had Will wondering how long he might be able to last.

Miranda slowed down her near relentless movements and leaned forward; the shift of her body sent out a crashing wave over him. Will felt himself nearing the peak, but he was not ready to leap off the cliff that would lead to a blinding orgasm. Miranda leaned over him, placing her palms over his heaving chest as she steadied herself. Her once wild ridding, now turned into small shallow grinds. Another show of control over him as she began to plant smoldering kisses onto his neck, before gracing his lips with hers. While she rolled her hips, sending out enough enticing signals of ecstasy to keep him aware of their connected bodies, not that he could lose his focus on anything else. Will's hands left their hold on her hips and wrapped themselves around her body as he brought her down on top him. Pressing their heat-soaked bodies together while he matched her soft grinds with small thrusts.

Will swallowed Miranda's gasp, when he pushed up against her, kicking his left leg out and used his right one to help push himself and Miranda to their side. Guiding Miranda off of him until they were both laying face to face. Miranda quickly tightened her left legs grip on him as she let her right leg stretch out. Will knew Miranda wanted control and Will was willing to give it to her, but the more they performed the more he realized he wanted something equal. He wanted this dance to have no leads, he wanted something they could share with one another, something other than the need for pleasure. He wanted them to build together to connect in a more intimate position. Where they worked together, not have to rely on one singular person's actions.

When they were both settled into the mattress, Will lowered his right arm, and took hold Miranda's left leg, lifting it higher on top of his hip before he began to slowly thrust back into her. Miranda met his thrust with well-timed rolls as they both sought out a rising pleasure that the other could only give them in this act. Miranda broke away from Will's lips and settled herself back into mouthing at his neck, traveling down until her mouth landed on crook of his neck. That was when Will felt Miranda's teeth sink into his skin as she bit down on him *hard*. Will sucked in air though his teeth at the pleasantly painful sensation and for a moment he wondered if Miranda might have unlocked something in him, but he quickly pushed that thought aside. In return for the bite Will's well-timed thrusts turned more aggressive, as he began to pick up a more brutal technique. Miranda released her hold on his flesh to let out a moan as she met his pace with her own.

“Oh god.” Miranda moaned out as they picked up speed and Will felt himself reaching his climax and this time, he was having a hard time holding it back as he found the rhythm, they had slowly built together begin to slip through him. He let go of Miranda’s thigh and took hold of the back of her head to pull her into a near desperate kiss, away to gain some stability over his heaving body. Miranda returned the motion with a just as heavily desperate kiss. Will felt Miranda clench around his cock then loosen the hold as she pushed her hips down and drove his cock further into her. Her sweltering wet heat once more engulfed all of him and Will felt his cock twitch inside of her. With the small spasm and a few more thrust, Miranda clinched around him and that was finally enough.

Will was hit with the enticing wave a pleasure, his muscles clinched as he felt the sweet release finally gift his nerves. He slowed his thrust while the orgasm traveled through him, yet he still tried to find a way for Miranda to hopefully come to her own pleasure. Miranda unclenched herself as she rolled her hips, trying to find a rhythm with Will. Her breath was near ragged along with his own as he found himself chasing the pleasure that was drawn from his body. Miranda dug the heal of her foot into Will’s side as she continued her drawn out grinds, he felt her foot slip against his skin as she continued to pleasure herself with his now sensitive cock. Will fought against the exhaustion that was brought on by the orgasm that opened the door for the roaming feeling of fatigue, as he continued to perform less than perfectly timed thrust that tried to match Miranda’s erratic grinds.

After a few more guided soft thrusts matched with hard grinds, Will felt Miranda spasm around his nearly softened cock. Her wet hot walls clenched and unclenched around him and Miranda pulled her face back and let out an airy moan, as her arms tightened around Will. This sent another harsh wave of drained pleasure through Will’s body. It felt like someone had flipped a switch on fried wires that still worked and the electricity that traveled though those wires sparked wildly, sending out electricity into the open air. Will felt his muscles twitch with Miranda’s as she rode out her orgasm and slowly came down from her own high. They pressed their foreheads together, eyes closed as they slowly came down from the blinding pleasure that they brought to each other, holding on to one another’s flushed bodies. Giving the other soft pecks on the lips now and then as they began to accept the fatigue that washed lazily over them.

Will slowly opened his eyes to be immediately trapped in Miranda’s own lust draining gaze. The two simply looked over one another, not a single word came out of each other’s mouths as they held one another. The only sound in the room was their own heavy breathing as they continued to simply watch one another. Miranda gently placed her hand on the side of Will’s face, her palm as warm as the rest of her body. Will then pressed his own hand on top of hers, holding it where it lay and adding more pressure. Will nuzzled into the welcome touch, closing his eyes, and taking the hold for what it was, before turning his head into the palm and laying a gentle kiss on it. Will opened his eyes and looked over towards Miranda, who smiled softly at the action, before leaning forward and pressing her own lips onto his. The tender kiss gave off the right amount warmth that helped ease them both into closing their eyes and melting into one another. Will’s hand left Miranda’s and reached out to hold the side of her face, where his thumb once again rubbed gently over her cheek. He felt Miranda let out a hum of contentment as he did the small act as they both broke away from the gentle hold that the kiss had them in. Opening their eyes once more and without saying a single word they untangled their bodies from one another.

Will slid to a sitting position, his cooling bare back leaned up against the sleek wooden headboard. His muscles still felt like jelly as he stretched his legs out. Miranda let out a content deep breath as she stretched out herself. Will watched through the corner of his eye as her whole body stretched out. Her muscles pulling taunt with her skin as she took advantage of her large bed, fingers and toes flared out as she let a soft moan at the relief that the action brought her. Will even noticed a pleased smile stretch across her face. Will turned his attention away from the display, the way Miranda looked, skin pulled tight, her legs fully extended, and her back arched upward as she continued the action. Even something so simple as stretching made Miranda look so enticing to him. It was enough to give Will ideas of perhaps offering to start another round with her. But it was the yawn that slipped past her lips that had him rethinking his initial thoughts. Instead he felt his own yawn deflate his lungs and he heard Miranda giggle causing him to turn his head to look down at her with a raised eyebrow.

“Guess we really worn each other out huh.” She simply said as she rolled onto her side to face him as she reached out to trace shapes onto his thigh. “There’s a wastebin on your side of the bed by the way, when you decide to you know.” She gestured with her head and a smirk lightly formed on her lips.

“Thanks.” Will murmured as he removed the condom and properly disposed of it in the wastebin. “And to reply to your first statement,” Will said as he reclaimed his spot on the bed, but this time laying fully on his back. Enjoying the embrace from the luxury mattress and the soft hold from one of Miranda’s many pillows. The way he felt his body simply melt into the spot, made him wish he could feel the same way with his own bed at home. But then again it wasn’t just the mattress that was causing his body to feel the way it did. “I’ll have to agree with you.” Miranda began to scoot closer to Will, until she was spooning his side, throwing her left leg over his and cuddling up close. Her head resting on his bare chest and Will lowered his arm to hold her close. Miranda let out another content sigh as she began to absent mindlessly run her finger around his chest.

“I’ll admit this was the best part of this evening.” Miranda spoke, drawing Will’s attention from the lull that washed over them like a warm wave. “Well besides the dancing.” Miranda chuckled lightly and Will returned her light laugh with his own.

“It had been a while since I danced with someone,” Will mussed as he ran his fingers through Miranda’s hair, cautious of not getting any caught in the dark locks. “And to be honest it never ended like the way it did tonight.” Will lightly chuckled, “It mostly ended with someone getting their feet stepped on or wanting to leave early. That person mainly being me.” Will let out a deep breath, feeling Miranda’s head rise and fall with his chest, before they both sunk back into place. His eyes slowly closed as he found himself becoming lost in the soft lull that the environment was placing for him. The gentle tracing of Miranda’s finger, her warm soft body held against his, and the comfort that it was creating. He could not help, but slowly drift off with the sensation.

“And to think, this night might not have happened all thanks to a simple misunderstanding.” Miranda’s voice was soft, loud enough that Will did not need to strain himself to hear it, but quiet enough that it did not fill the room. Will felt her finger stop its mindless trace and her hand fully lay out on his chest. Will opened his eyes and peered down at the top of her head,

before she angled her head so she was now looking up at him. Their eyes once more searching each other's faces.

"Let's not think about that tonight." Will spoke as he continued to run his fingers through Miranda's hair. Miranda leaned up and gave Will a soft gentle kiss on the lips, before returning back to laying her head on his chest.

"All water under the bridge."

The forest trail was once again barren like the last time Will's imagination had thrown him into the surroundings. Except at least this time he was gifted with the warmth of the sun that bounced off the pure white snow and brought some life to the barren trees. Will took in the tranquil surroundings that his mind had given him. A part of him wished it could be real, that he was actually experiencing the moment in real life. The way the small wisp of wind past him and the crunch of a twig under his steps. he wanted it to be real, he wanted to keep walking down the trail and fall into the forests embrace, but something didn't quiet sit right, it felt too perfect.

Will knew his mind, though some days it felt like he didn't, that his mind was a stranger that he sometimes ran into now and then while out on the town. But he knew it well enough to not fall into the false lull of security that it is trying to provide for him. With the new feeling of realization, a feeling of lucidity crashed over him as he abruptly stopped. No longer did he feel the urge to follow the trail like a sailor who followed a sirens enchanting song. Will stood in the middle of the once peaceful trail and waited for something, anything to happen. With his guard raised Will took a cautious step back, his eyes scanned the area that surrounded him, but all he could see were the cluster of trees that resembled iron bars of a cell.

As he took another step back was when something caught his attention and it caused him to stop in his tracks. The sound was quick and fleeting, it brushed past his ears like a swift breeze, it did not last long enough for him to identify it right away and it had Will standing there. Straining to hear the that brief sound once again, no longer did he feel the tranquil of the forest surround him. Instead he felt on edge as he tried to understand what could have made that sound. While he stood completely still, eyes searching and ears straining, he heard *it* again. It was the crisp clinks of a chains.

With the realization of the sound, Will felt himself take a step back as he recalled the last time, he had heard the elegant sound. If pain was a sensation someone could feel while asleep, Will would have sworn he could feel the phantom pain of his arms being ripped away from him. He quickly turned on his feet ready to head in the opposite direction of the sound, but he was met with a cluster of trees blocking his path, cutting him off from going the way he came. Wherever that way could have been. Even though he knew he should have been able to simply walk through the crowded cluster of trees, if this was real life, then he should have been able to. But this was a dream and logic did not exist in the world of make believe. The trees, once welcoming now suddenly felt overwhelming as they toward over him as they threatened to trap him. Will hesitantly turned away from the unwelcomed blockade as he was forced to face the trail once again.

Where he watched them, several snake like gold chains slithered towards him, emerging from the forest, cutting through the dirt path with ease as they advanced upon him. Will took a step back in a poor attempt to create a distance between himself and the glimmering chains as they grew closer towards him, but his attempt was squashed. His back hit the strong unmoving barrier that was a tree, his back dug into the rough bark as he tried to faze through the immovable object that stood behind him. Will found himself facing the ugly feeling of helplessness as he watched the chains slow approach, it was as if they were taking their time on purpose. Teasing him, taunting him as they slithered closer. What would they do when they reached him, would they hold him down, or would they drag him off into the unknown where a greater danger might lay in wait for him.

Will quickly shook off the rising feeling of fear that wanted to take over his mind and keep him cemented to the spot. Instead of falling victim to the chains like last time, he took action as he pushed himself off the trunk and ran. Side stepping the slithering chains, making sure to avoid the way they strike out towards him, trying to wrap themselves around any part of his body. He dodged the strikes as he continued to run down the trail, taking in how much of it twisted under his harsh footsteps as he ran down it, not knowing where it was leading him. All he knew was that it was leading him away from the chains. The one thing about dreams or in this case nightmares was that you did not feel the physical effects, like you would when it came to running. You knew you were running and you didn't feel staggering breaths or tiering muscles, you could run for as long and as far as you could in your dreams. Sometimes if felt powerful, freeing at other times, but for Will it felt like survival.

Will ran down the winding path, trying to predict when the next sudden turn in the trail or the next stone he had to dodge while attempting to escape the stalking gold chains that were set on trying to entrap him. It felt so real to the man and that was what was so terrifying, not the impending danger of the chains, but the fact that he was having a hard time convincing himself that this was still a nightmare. That he would end up walking from at any moment and be thrown back into the real world, because at the moment as he ran through this predatory like situation it felt all too real for him.

Will continued to flee from the slithering chains and the way they clinked like well-tuned instruments; it sounded as though they were taunting him. It had his heart rate quicken as they sung out to him with threats of what might happen when they suddenly had him in their hold. But soon he heard those sinister chimes grow small in the distance, for the first time since he managed to out flank the golden chains, he felt like he was back in control of the situation. But even though he felt himself grow calm he did not slow down his run. He knew better then to fall into the false sense of security, he knew he had to keep running. His body would not give up on him, so there was no fear of growing tired as he continued down the treacherous trail, hoping for an end.

And an end did approach him, but not the end he thought he might receive as he ran blind down the endless terrain. Will skidded to a halt, feet digging into the dirt as he fully came to another obstacle cutting off his path. An obstacle he did not foresee being thrown his way as his mind tried to make him into yet another victim. There laying in the middle of the path was a large mound of flesh and fur, fur that would be described as dark as the midnight sky. Will stood still, the thought of the impending chains all forgotten as he stared at the odd mound and waited for something to come from it. Will for once since being thrown into the

world that his pure imagination roamed free in, did not know what to do. Should he approach this new challenge or stand completely still and wait for it to make the first move. Both possibilities circled his thoughts as he took in the sight trying to figure out from a distance what this mound of fur and flesh might actually be. That's when a sound broke through his mind and it had those circling thoughts come to a hard halt, unlike the first sound that alerted him of the danger that had been approaching him, this sound he knew all too well. A sound that haunted him some nights, a sound that caused a deep instinct in him to rise to the surface and have him act upon it whenever it graced his ears. It was a low soft *whine*.

The sound gave him a reason to make up his mind and it had him take a step forward, towards the unknown. With each cautious step another whine came from the mound of fur. Will knew he should be wearier of the situation, not moments ago he had been running from the impending threat of gold chains and now he was approaching a possible trap that was laid out in front of him that played at one of his biggest weaknesses of all. But even with the thought of the possible doom emerging in his mind, Will still couldn't stop himself as he approached the mound, as it still whimpered out. The sound of the almost pitiful whimpers scrapped at his eardrums and it was the sound that had him moving, had him ignoring the idea of the danger that might await him. Will took one more step and he heard the familiar sound of an uncalled-for twig snapping under his foot. The clean snap sent a ripple down the mounds body and Will watched as the mound began to shift where it laid, as it slowly revealed itself to Will. The unknown figure unwound itself, it no longer resembled a mound of black fur and flesh as it stretched itself out as it took a form that Will could easily identify.

A large wolf was what laid in front of him and Will took in all of the creature, eyes roaming over its muscle driven body. Taking in all of it for moment, studying the creature as he knew that it was studying him. They both shared the same thought of trying to figure out why they had come across one another and what they should do about it. Will took a step back; he was in the presence of such a predatory animal and he knew he needed to be more cautious than before. The wolf with its near pitch-black eyes watched as Will took a step back, it's mountain peak like ears twitched as it listened to his footsteps. Before it slowly came to its feet, Will could see the sore stiffness that played at the wolf's body as it rose to its full height. Long limbs on display as it shifted to take balance where it stood. Will's eyes roamed all over the wolf and that was when he caught the sight of something cutting through its thick ink colored fur. It was the eye-catching color of gold. The wolf shook its muscular body, an attempt to relieve some of that heavy tension that no doubt weighed it down and he once again heard the unmistakable sound of elegant chimes of chains clinking together.

The wolf fully turned towards Will and though he could not properly read its expression he could feel the emotion that was coming off of the animal in short pulses as it focused its full attention on to him. The animal felt *tired*. Tired of the chains, tired of the weight, tired of the endless fight, the wolf felt tired of simply existing. Will felt the sudden urge to take that heavy emotion that the creature bared and rid it of it. To take it and burry it deep into the ground where it could never hurt the animal again. Seeing the once powerful animal, that had lived with knowledge of its own unbeatable strength, that lived as though it was something great. Now torn apart, forced to succumb to a state that it was never ment to live in, it drove a sharp thorn through Will and he wanted to do something to ease the animal's mind. To help it return to its once glorious state. To remind it of what it once was, of what it still was and see the light of life grace those deep sorrow filled eyes.

Will took a step forward and he watched as the wolf mirrored his movements, taking its own step towards him. It felt as though there was an invisible link between the two of them as they slowly approached one another. The chains that weighed the animal down dragged against the forest floor, but it did not hinder the wolf's movements. It showed that the wolf had adapted to the weight, grown accustomed to the gold that bound it.

Will knelt to the ground, to show that they were on equal terms, that he was not a threat. Though he thought it was funny to even consider himself a threat to such a powerful predator. The wolf stopped in its tracks as it watched as Will knelt to the ground, its large eyes flicked around him, taking in all of the man that knelt in front of it. Will reached out with one hand and wasn't at all that surprised to see the wolf take a step back, its ears pinned back and its lips twitched. An unconscious response, as it showed Will that it was willing to bare its sharp teeth to him. But Will did not retreat his hand, he held it out and waited for the wolf to take this new stance into its mind, to come to a realization that he was not a going to lash out towards it. The wolf's eyes peered at Will and he felt as though the animal could see right into him, that it no longer saw just himself, but his own soul and the stare had Will pinned to the spot.

The wolf took a step forward, its large paws sinking into the dirt, its sharp obsidian claws breaking through the terrain. The animal resumed its slow approach towards the man, eyes never breaking away from his, holding Will to his spot with its heavy gaze. The wolf stopped when it stood only a few inches away from Will's offered hand and when it stood there was when it finally released Will from its gaze as its eyes turned down at his hand. Will watched as the wolf took in his hand, staring down at it with a blank expression, Will could not help, but wonder what thoughts ran wild through that predator's mind as it studded Will's hand. That was when the wolf leaned forward and nuzzled its large heavy head into his hand and Will was taken back in an instant. The coarse black fur enveloped Will's sense of touch and the hot puffs of air that escaped its nostril brushed against the small exposed amount of skin of his wrist. Will was still as the wolf took in his gentle touch, its sorrow eyes closed and Will could tell that it was the first gentle touch the animal had ever felt for the longest of time.

Will slowly began to lift his other hand; his movement was slow and sly as he tried not to startle the settled beast. His other hand reached out towards one of the golden chains that hugged the wolf's thick chest, a part of him was convinced that he would be able to help ease the animal of its burden. He would be able to rid it of the chains and bring it the freedom that it had given up on. His fingers brushed over one of the golden links of the chains, Will casted the wolf a quick look and was relieved to see it was still lost in the gentle touch. Now and then Will would bend his fingers and scratch at a soft spot for the animal. With the addition of a gentle scratch the wolf's thick tail would softly begin to sway side to side, its eyes still closed as it tried to nuzzle deeper into the pets it was gifted. He took that as a sign of distraction, before he fully took hold of the chain.

That was when he felt the wolf's body go ridged and Will quickly looked over at the animal. Its eyes were wide open and they held a vacant look to them, as if they were staring at something beyond him. Will slowly looked away from the wolf to turn his attention back onto the chains. His hand griped the golden links and they felt warm under his hold. A deep breath from the wolf caught Will's attention and he knew what caused the animal to take such a breath. *Anticipation.* It waited for Will to continue what he was doing, and Will took a

stronger hold on the chain. The thick metal radiated a type of warmth that enveloped his hand, Will felt the warmth slowly travel through his fingers and up his arm. For a split-second Will wanted to pull his hand back away from the infectious warmth, before it could travel any further. But Will glanced over towards the wolf, who stood completely still, so still that it looked as though the animal had stopped breathing. So Will shook off the idea of stopping and tightened his hold on the chain. He jerked his arm back in a hard yank and the chain moved with his motion, Will yanked a second time and he felt the edge of his lip twitch upwards as the chain once more followed his movement. He could see the chains links pull away from the wolf's body, no longer did it hug tight against it and he heard the wolf let out an anxious whine as it slowly realized that its torment might be over with.

Will's other hand fell from the side of the wolf's head and joined his other to achieve a better hold on the metal. He adjusted his stance, heels digging into the ground as he prepared himself for another harsh tug. That was when the wolf's anxious whines quickly turned into something fiercer. Will stopped his movements and turned his head to look at the wolf, who's ears were pinned back once more, its hackles slowly rose, and its dark lips were pulled back into a snarl. Revealing its sharp jagged teeth to whatever might have set it off. A low growl shuttered through the wolf's body and the rumbling sound had the chains clinking together. The vibration from the wolf's growl traveled through the chains and into Will's touch, it caused him to let go of the metal and it had him turning his attention away from the wolf and towards what might be causing the shift in the animal.

With a new form of caution that coated his body and mind, Will slowly began to twist his body around. Following the wolf's harden gaze as to what it saw as a threat as he turned to look over his shoulder. His eyes widened as he was finally able to see what the wolf was growling at; the roaming chains had finally caught up to him. Before Will could act, before he could even stand up, the chains lashed out at him, striking at him like a venomous snake.

Will woke with a shuddering start, taking in a shaky breath as his mind tried to process what it just went through. As if it wasn't the one to conjure up such a situation like it had, as though it was the victim. Will stared up at the unfamiliar ceiling with wide eyes, he could hear his heavy heartbeat pounding in his ears. He took a more stable breath through his nose as he tried to will his heart to calm down, to convince himself that he was not in danger, that he was instead laying in a very comfortable bed. A bed he knew for a fact he did not own, staring up at a ceiling that was not his. Realizing that he was in an unfamiliar room did not help calm his racing nerves, as he tried to cling to any thoughts with a still sleep muddled mind that could help him figure out his surroundings. That was when he heard it, a soft hum graced his ears and he felt something soft and warm tighten around his midsection. For a split-second Will thought that he had not woken up from his nightmare, that his mind had simply thrown him into a new scenario. But those fear laced thoughts soon evaporated when he felt a small puff of warm breath against his neck and he looked down to see Miranda's sleeping figure curled securely around his side.

He took in the soft sight with greed as he looked over Miranda, for the first time since he had woken up. The soft glow from the morning sun that entered through the two glass doors, it caressed her slumbering figure, kissing her skin with its presence. Will noticed how peaceful she looked nestled up against him, her arm and head resting on top of his chest, her hand in a loss fist. She looked so at rest for a moment Will felt a sliver of jealousy towards her, but that

feeling easily washed away when Miranda let out a soft sigh and nuzzled closer into Will's chest. A warm smile pulled at his lips caused by such a moment; he barely even realized it. Will raised his hand, careful not to wake her up and with a feather like touch ran his fingers through her hair, which was still frizzy from their previous activities the night before.

Miranda unconsciously smiled at the welcomed touch, but still did not wake up. Will slowly looked away from her and began to look around the room. Taking in his surroundings fully, able to see more of it now that it was not shrouded in a low light. He noticed a well sized vanity desk with a heart shaped mirror that had an elegant frame and it was paired with a wired metal chair with an also heart shaped back piece. That sat near the far corner of the room a short walking distance from the doorway that led to the balcony. Will's eyes continued to explore the room and in front of the bed was a large dresser that no doubt came up to his chest. Like Miranda's bookshelf a small amount of different knickknacks sat on top of it, along with a small desk mirror and an elegant black vase with a few red roses sitting in it. Will wondered if those roses were actually real or not, Miranda seemed like the person to have a few house plants, but at the same time she also seemed like the kind who was happy with the false verities. He also wouldn't put it past Miranda to buy herself some roses as a way to treat herself.

A yawn broke Will away from his thoughts and he felt Miranda shift against him, Will looked down at her. He watched as Miranda lazily stretched out, she still did not move off of him and when she was done, she simply returned to her previous position. Miranda took in a deep breath through her nose, before her eyes fluttered opened and she turned her head to look up at him.

"Good morning sweetheart." Miranda softly said her eyelids slightly cast and a relaxed smile appeared on her face and Will couldn't help his own smile as he looked down at her. Their eyes meeting for the first time since they both woke up.

"Good morning darlin'." Will replied, no longer effected by the natural twang that came with the name. As he resumed to run his fingers through her hair and his eyes lazily looked over her face. Miranda let out a content sigh towards the light touch.

"Last night was really something wasn't it." Miranda lightly chuckled as she began to run her finger up and down the plan of Will's chest. Will let out a soft breath as he recalled last night's events. The tension-stricken dinner party at Lecter's followed by their passion filled experience they had together. Where they seemed to remove all their barriers and caved into the building desire that they had felt for each other. With all that had happened Will was surprised he didn't feel more tired than he had.

"You can say that." Will chuckled back as he gazed up at the ceiling and took in the feeling of contentment that washed over him as he laid in the luxury bed, head resting on an extremely plush pillow with the woman he felt a strong connection to resting on his chest. It almost did not feel real for him as though this was the actually dream that he was experiencing and what he just woken up from was the real world. "It almost doesn't feel real." He murmured not exactly to Miranda, but more to himself.

Miranda let out a hum, before she angled her head to look up at him and Will casted his eyes down to look at her. A soft smile formed on her lips. "Well I can assure you," She leaned

upwards and laid a few gentle kisses on his jawline, “it is real.” She kissed Will fully on the lips, her lips felt plush and warm against him. The feeling of her against him was enough to help him convince himself that all what he had experienced and what he was experiencing was indeed real and he felt himself begin to melt into her mellow kiss. Miranda slowly pulled away before she nuzzled her head under his chin and let out a deep breath. “I could stay like this forever.” Miranda’s voice was light as she settled close to him, her finger gently doodling along his chest.

“That does sound tempting.”

Miranda slowly turned her head up to look at Will, “You know what else sounds real tempting,” She spoke slowly drawing out each word in a playful manner. Will looked down at her and he cocked an eyebrow in response. “A nice,” Miranda’s fingers began to walk up Will’s chest, “hot,” her fingers came under his jaw and her thumb rubbed his chin, “shower.” She whispered as she pushed herself up and sensually smiled at Will. “And my show has room for two.” She all but sang as the hand that was under Will’s chin now moved up so she could run her hand through his hair. Will cocked an eyebrow and a sly smile began to form on his face as his own hand went to run through Miranda’s hair again.

“You’re right that does sound tempting.” His voice was as low as hers, as his hand slid away from her hair and down the curve of her back her skin still warm from sleep and the morning sun. Miranda lend in until their faces were inches apart.

“Then let me tempt you.” She purred as she fully sat up and Will watched as Miranda slid off the bed. She stood by the side of the bed; her whole bare body was covered in the morning light and she turned to him with a promiscuous smile. “Well come on,” Miranda said as she walked around the bed her hands traveling over the rumpled state of the sheets and comforter, she stopped at one column post and wrapped her hands around the column. Swinging herself slight to the side before she came to lean against it. “A shower can be so lonely don’t you think.” Her long dark hair swayed slightly to drape over her bare shoulder and her finger ran up and down the post. Will couldn’t stop the amused smile that formed on his face as he took in all of her.

“Don’t I know it.”

Will sat on one of Miranda’s three stools in her large kitchen, wearing yesterday’s slacks, his dress shirt hung on his shoulders, he hadn’t yet brought himself to button it and his hair was still damp from his and Miranda’s shared shower. Where they spent the whole time exploring one another’s bodies again, rekindling their shared passion they had for another, bring themselves to the brink of ecstasy until they were both pushed over the edge. They stayed in the show where the warm muscle relaxing water washed over them and steam filled the room. Mapping out the other’s body until the water began to run cold. To the point not even the heat that was made from their passion could keep their skin warm, only then did they eventually get out. Will’s eyes looked around the kitchen somewhat impressed at how clean it was as if it was hardly ever used. He looked down at the elegant coffee cup that rested between his hands, the cup was such a stark contrast to the mugs he owned. The cup felt so delicate in his hold, the warmth from the coffee easily seeped through it and into his palms.

Will looked inside the cup and was met with his own reflection looking back at him through the near pitch-black liquid.

“How’s the coffee?” Miranda asked as she entered the kitchen, unlike Will Miranda had the means to dress in something other than the clothes she had worn yesterday. But instead of getting fully dressed in a new outfit after the shower, Miranda decided to wear a long cream satin bridal style robe, that brushed the floor and gave her the illusion of walking on air. It hugged her body perfectly as if it was a second skin. Will took a drink of the coffee; it’s bitter bite and enveloping warmth was welcoming. If their previous activities together didn’t wake him up, he knew that this coffee would have.

“Really good,” Will watched as Miranda walked around the island counter and stood in front of him. “Thank you.” He smiled as he set the cup down in an almost gentle manner afraid that even the slightest rough treatment might cause the cup to crack.

Miranda smiled at him, unlike Will her hair had fully dried and she had arranged it to be held in a loose updo hairstyle. That wasn’t ment to last long, only ment to keep it out of her face until she decided what to do with it. “I’m glad you like it; it’s been a while since I played hostess.” She lightly chuckled as she began to prepare herself a cup of coffee. Miranda didn’t own a machine as oddly mechanical like Hannibal’s, but she did own something top of the line. That called for one too many inputs that Will wouldn’t agree with. A simple press of a button and wait it out was enough to satisfy him, he did not need several functions for different coffee styles, or an option to steam milk. He was happy with simple and both Miranda’s and Hannibal’s ways of brewing coffee were far from it.

“You’re doing a pretty good job.” Will complemented with a smile and for a split-second Will could have sworn he saw her cheeks flush before she took a sip of her coffee.

“Well, that’s nice to know.” Miranda smiled as she set her cup down on the counter, before she looked around the kitchen. “I guess now comes the important question,” she leaned on the counter and Will raised his eyebrow. “What should we do about breakfast?”

Will smirked and leaned back in his seat, running a hand over his mouth. “Can’t really say,” he scratched under his chin and played a look that seemed as if he was contemplating the question. “What sounds good to you. It’s your kitchen after all, I’m just the guest here.” He said with a loose shrug before he went back to lean on the counter. Miranda tilted her head to the side and her eyes crinkled in amusement.

“You know what sounds really good,” Miranda stood up her hands braced on the counter top, “some blueberry pancakes.” She practically beamed when she said it and the joy that rolled off of her soon began to sink into Will as well. “And I so happen have a container of blueberries in the fridge.” Miranda walked over to the fridge and began to rummage through it, the smile never leaving her face, Will couldn’t get over how excited Miranda seemed to have gotten over the idea of being able to make something as simple as blueberry pancakes. She was practically giddy and he was enjoying every moment of it.

“Blueberry pancakes it is then.” Will smiled as he stood up from his stool and walked around the counter, not quite sure where to go as he looked around the kitchen trying to figure out where the things, they needed to make pancakes might be stored.

“Great.” Miranda once again beamed as she closed the fridge door with her hip, with a plastic container of blueberries in her hand, before a soft look of realization washed over her. “Oh, I mostly use the box mix. Is that okay?” Will chuckled lightly at the innocent question.

“You’re talking to a man who grew up on toast and off brand cereal, now and then frozen waffles.” Will tilted his head and smiled. “Box mix is fine by me.” Miranda perked up at the reassurance.

“Alright, well let’s get started then.” She said with a joy filled smile, before she walked around Will and towards one of her many cabinets. “I’ll make the batter and you can be in charge of cooking them.” She spoke as she pulled out a box of pre-made pancake mix from one of the top shelves. “You’ll find a frying pan in one of those lower cabinets.” Miranda said as she pointed towards one of the ground cabinets by the fridge.

“Alright.” Will smiled as he turned and squatted down to dig out a frying pan that like most of Miranda’s kitchen looked hardly used. As he stood up with the pan in one hand, he was met with the sight of Miranda measuring out some water, her eyes narrowed as she peered at the glass measuring cup. Her tongue slightly peeking out from the side of mouth as she tried to see if she had the exact amount of water that was needed for the mix. That’s when he felt it, the infamous flutter as it ran across his chest. It had him just standing there for a moment, once more questioning why it had decided to grace him with its presence. It also had him wishing that this still unknown feeling would make up its mind on when it wanted to affect him and when it didn’t. He already had the issue of separating his emotions with those of outsiders making it difficult to understand if he actually felt a certain way or if it was just the person that his empathy accidently absorbed. He did not need the extra challenge of trying to figure out his own genuine emotions piled on top of that.

“What is it?” Miranda giggled as she looked up from the measuring cup and tilted her head. The question was enough to knock Will out of his mind and back into reality.

“Oh, it nothing.” Will smiled as he walked over to the electric stove top and placed the pan on top of one of burners.

The two sat at the kitchen island across from one another, both with a plate of pancakes and a cup of coffee in front of them. Miranda was the first to consume part her breakfast as Will focused on cutting himself off a piece. As he stabbed into the spongy cake that was lightly drizzled in maple syrup, he heard Miranda make an odd sound. Will looked up from his plate and Miranda had her hand held in front of her mouth, with an odd expression painted across her face.

“Should I be worried?” Will asked with an airy chuckle as he put down his fork. Miranda swallowed with a grimace, it was clear she did not want to, but she had to or else she risked spitting the food out.

“These pancakes are really not that good.” She replied as she shook her head and let out a unamused chuckle as she set down her fork. Will looked down at the pancake, they looked fine to him. Golden brown and he pulled off the perfect circle shape when he had poured the batter. He picked up his fork and placed the piece he had cut off into his mouth and was immediately met with a bitter sour taste that did not agree with the soft sweetness from the

pancake. Miranda was right the pancakes did not taste very good. Miranda let out a soft laugh, Will guessed it was caused by the face he pulled after he swallowed his piece.

“You’re right something is wrong with these pancakes.” Will said as he set down his fork,

“Maybe we should have made the batter from scratch or something.” Miranda pushed her pancake around with her fork as if it might reveal something, tell her why it tasted so strange.

“I don’t think it’s the batter.” Will picked up his cup of coffee and took a sip, he wanted to wash away the lingering sour taste with a more pleasant bitter taste that he enjoyed.

“Could it have been the blueberries?” Miranda asked with a tilt of her head and Will had a look that answered her question. Miranda let out a sigh and leaned back in her chair. “Sounds about right our first morning together and it’s tainted by bad blueberries.” Miranda chuckled, but Will could hear the bitterness in the laugh. Reminding himself that Miranda tended to hold herself as a perfectionist.

“Hey it’s alright,” Will leaned over the table and gently took Miranda’s hand in his, rubbing soothing circles with his thumb on the top of her hand. “It’s not that big of a deal, we can have something else and try again tomorrow when you come over.” The mention of tomorrow seemed to have snapped Miranda out of her negative mood as she looked up at him.

“That’s right,” Miranda turned her hand, taking a more proper hold of his hand and a more pleased look crossed her face. “We have tomorrow together and hopefully all day today?” Miranda piqued with a raised eyebrow. Will let out a chuckle.

“I don’t know, I mean with the sudden flux in the case. I’m surprised I have this morning with you.”

“Oh, come now,” Miranda slowly rose and walked around the island an artful smile spreading across her lips as she grew close, until she was behind Will, placing both hands on the back his shoulders and began to rub her hands up and down his back. “Didn’t you ever play hooky *Professor* Graham.” She whispered close to his ear as she gently squeezed his shoulders and Will felt his mouth go slightly dry and his face threaten to heat up as he tried to understand why when Miranda said that single word, that single title, with just the right amount of sensuality dripping into it had his mind going haywire and had his heartbeat turn heavy.

“I mean,” Will licked his lips as he tried to gather himself, but he found himself getting lost in Miranda’s deep promiscuous touch. “I was known to do it once in a while.” He managed to chuckle as recalled the small amount of times he would skip school in favor of walking around whatever town he lived in or the days he called in sick to work just so he could spend the day locked in his house where the outside world could not touch him.

“Then let today be a part of that once in a while.” Miranda said her voice airy, above a whisper as she leaned her body into his and angled herself so that they were now looking at one another. As she tried convinced Will into caving in and Will felt himself slowly giving into the temptation that was laid in front of him. It would be so easy to turn his phone off, to through it to the side and give all his attention towards Miranda. Shut out the outside world

and just have it be the two of them, he deserved it after all, didn't he? Always at Jack's beck and call, always willing to tear his mind open and take the blows towards his mental health. All in the name of justice. It wouldn't be that bad to just take a step back for one day and feel normal for once. Will opened his mouth ready to give his response when he was interrupted by the deep round call of Miranda's doorbell. They the two stared at one another, both caught off by the sudden chime. They shared a look of confusion neither moving from their spot, until the deep chime rang through the house once more.

"Were you expecting someone?" Will asked as he turned his head away from Miranda and towards the doorway of the kitchen with a puzzled look.

Miranda lightly shook her head and straightened to look over Will's head and towards the doorway as well. "No I'm not expecting anyone." She answered a light wave of confusion laced in her words as she tilted her head slightly, clear she was running through the possibilities of who might be at her front door. Another chime rang out, whoever was on the other side was possibly growing impatient, because after the chime followed a heavy three hit knock. "It seems like I better go see who that is." Miranda straightened herself out before she walked over to the door and disappeared around the corner. Leaving Will to sit there in the kitchen by himself.

It didn't take long though for Will's own curiosity to rise inside of him. As he tried to see if he might be able to catch a hint of whatever conversation might be going on. He had heard Miranda open her door and that was it, silence had followed and that was enough to have Will standing up and going to the kitchen entrance. When he leaned around the doorway, he couldn't stop the look of shock that no doubt crossed his face when he laid eyes on who stood on the other side of Miranda's front door.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry, but I cracked up twice when writing the morning after scene. All because of blueberry pancakes lol

The Battle Between Heart and Mind

Chapter Summary

> What had started out as a domestic morning between Will and Miranda has suddenly take a drastic shift. As Will is faced with two of his worlds colliding in a chaotic explosion and he has no cover to dive behind leaving him torn in two.

Chapter Notes

> I want to thank everyone who has left those wonderful comments, kudos and who are enjoying this fic. It means a whole lot to me and I just what to thank every one of you. Hope you enjoy this chapter :)

“Mister Crawford,” Miranda spoke her voice was a pitch higher than normal caused by the surprise. Will peered around the kitchen doorway as he slowly began to button up his shirt, as he tried to wrap his mind around why his boss was standing outside on Miranda’s front porch. While at the same time trying to blend into the background as much as possible until it was time to let himself be known. “And what calls for such an unexpected visit this morning?” Miranda asked; her pitch in voice returned back to normal as soon as the initial shock had worn off, as she crossed her arms over her chest and shifted her stance, she changed her stature into something more ridged more assertive. All Will could see was the back of Miranda, but something told him that she was giving Jack a forced friendly smile that was all too clear how fake it was. The type of smile a boss would give an employee who had just walked into their office unexpected, unwanted, and now they had to remind themselves to be nice as they waited for the reason behind the sudden intrusion. That was the smile Will no doubt knew was being given towards Jack at the moment.

“It’s Agent Crawford, Miss. Rhettford,” Jack’s voice was stern, Will knew the sound of the tone by heart at this point, Jack was in his justice heavy headset. Now it was the time to make himself known. In order to figure out why Jack was there and in case Miranda might need him to play guard while dealing with this more brazen side of Jack. “And the reason I am here Miss. Rhettford is because.” Jack trailed off when he noticed Will’s approach. “Will, I didn’t expect you to be here.” Jack raised an eyebrow and tweaked his head slightly. It was clear there was curiosity behind the facial expression along with something else that Will could not identify.

“You didn’t expect me to be at my girlfriend’s house?” Will crossed his arms as he stood behind Miranda. He knew some part of himself should feel a bit of embarrassment, when he

thought about it. There he stood behind Miranda, shirt hastily button, hair a bit matted from not being properly dried and Miranda in nothing, but an elegant satin robe. It all, but screamed what the two were up to the night previous, so it was only rational for Will to feel some embarrassment, but all he felt was the rising sting of irritation. “So why are you here Jack?” Though his tone could be interpreted as hard, he tried to keep himself as passive as he could be, tried to come off as more curious than hostile. He did not want to bring out Jack’s own hostility that easily came out when he was in investigator mode, when he was being challenged as well.

“Right,” Jack clipped as he adjusted his stance clear the initial shock of seeing Will had worn off as he got back on track. “As I was about to tell Miss. Rhettford, the reason I am here has to do with the current investigation on the Black Widow.” Will couldn’t help the bewilder look that crossed his face as he took in Jack’s answer.

“I’m sorry, I don’t quite understand what you mean by that.” Miranda spoke as she tightened her arms around herself and a look of pure confusion appeared on her face.

“Me neither,” Will spoke as he moved to stand next to Miranda instead of behind her. “What does Miranda have to do with the Black Widow case?” Will asked as he placed a hand on her shoulder and he felt as Miranda reached up and put her hand on top of his. The simple gesture of support was the only thing keeping Will from flat out standing in front of her, as a wave of protective instinct came over him.

Jack let out a huff of heavy air and the vapor from the hot breath twisted in the cool morning air before it disappeared. “Will, I really don’t think this is the best idea.” He said, his voice sounded like it was trying to come off as a friendly warning, but it was drastically missing the friendly part. Will could see that Jack was trying his best not to pinch the bridge of his nose and come off as frustrated. Will couldn’t figure out if the frustration was pointed towards him or the case. It also had him wondering if Jack would have called him if he wasn’t there right now and let him know that he had questioned his girlfriend at some point. Knowing Jack like he did the answer would no doubt be a no. He would keep Will in the dark, putting a hood over his eyes like a falconer did to their precious bird of prey. Only removing it when they needed their pet to go after the target. Until that time came the bird sat in the dark with their sense muffled.

“Then can you please tell me what I have to do with this then?” Miranda asked, clear her patience was growing thin as she reinserted herself into the conversation.

“Perhaps this can all be explained back at the Bureau.” Jack stated avoiding the question as he attempted to gain control over the situation. Will narrowed his eyes at the blatant side step, but Jack paid him no mind as he pointed his attention only towards Miranda.

“So you want to interrogate me *Agent* Crawford, is that it.” Miranda’s voice was stern, the way she said the title through nearly clenched teeth made it clear she had officially lost any form of patience, perhaps even respect with the man.

“What exactly are you accusing her of Jack?” Will asked as his own patience had worn thin and he could feel something akin to agitation, but it was mixed with the protective feeling from earlier. It had the two emotions colliding together and becoming something new, a

feeling Will wasn't quite sure how to deal with it as it gripped ever muscle in him and had his mind running hot. He had to fight off the urge to stand in front of Miranda and take over the conversation completely.

"Will." Jack said, his name came out as warning letting the profiler know that he was on thin ice with the other. That he needed to watch his step and watch his words or else who knows what might happen next. Will narrowed his eyes, not exactly challenging the man, but he easily felt the urge to. So he took the warning and bit his tongue for the moment. Jack gave him a look that acknowledged Will's response and turned his attention back to Miranda. "Please Miss Rhettford, if you'll come with me." Jack said as he held out his hand.

"Not until you tell me what is going on." Miranda said as she took a step back and out of Will's light hold. It was not a yell, but it had the impact of one. Especially for Will as he felt the impact of Miranda's own well concealed panic coated with frustration be released and lashed out in a means of self-defense. Striking Will with its lashing limbs as a result.

"It'll all be explained back at the Bureau." Jack repeated, voice like stone, the lashing had no effect on him and Will tried his best to not roll his eyes.

Why are you being so vague about this Jack, what exactly did you find that has you dodging questions? Will thought to himself.

Miranda let out a frustrated sigh and pinched the bridge of her nose. "Alright, let me change first." Miranda lowered her hand and tilted her head with a face that read, 'will you at least give me that.'

"By all means." Jack said as he clasped his hands in front of himself. As he presented himself as willing to indulge in the small act.

"Thank you." Miranda replied with fire in her words as she turned around and began to head back up to her room. Not even glancing at Will as she did so. The two watched as Miranda left them standing at the front door as soon as Miranda disappeared, did Will quickly turn back to Jack.

"Alright Jack what the hell is going on here?" Will hissed as he tried to keep his voice down, but still maintained the heated emotion he felt. Jack continued to stare up at the interior balcony Miranda composedly stormed across, before turning his dark eyes onto Will.

"I really wish you weren't here Will." Jack sighed and Will believed him, but that did not sooth the frustration that bubbled inside of him.

But I am though, can't change that outcome as much as you wished you could.

"Jack." Will pressed as he crossed his arms, "Don't dodge the question, not with me."

"Fine, we looked into the three victims banking history like *you* suggested," Will did not miss the way he emphasized the word 'you' like whatever was going to follow next was about to be his fault. That did not steer Will away though as he continued to wait. "And we did find a connection," Jack slipped his hands into his coat pockets, "a pretty big one. Turns out all

three of them made a few pretty large purchases with one Scarlet Swan Fashion in the past few months. It seems your girlfriend might be the link we've been looking for."

Will felt his blood turn to ice and his heart tried to sink inside his chest. It was shock, but it felt more mutated to him. It had more of a bite, it had a greater ability to erase one's mind of all thoughts, and it had his muscles going stiff. It slowly coiled around Will and began to squeeze until it was hard to breath, he could hear his heart beating heavily in his ears, so that ment it hadn't stopped. Was he having a panic attack, why was it suddenly so hard to breath, why couldn't he think straight, and why was the edges of his vision suddenly beginning to blur? Was he actually having a panic attack at this very moment? Will tried to swallow the small amount of saliva left in his mouth, but it was difficult. He felt his esophagus respond with the command, yet his throat felt too dry to allow it to do anything.

"Will?" Jack spoke, taking a slight step forward with his hand slightly reaching out towards the profiler. Will blinked a few times, his eyes stung and he could feel them burn with each close of his eyelids. He hadn't even realized he was staring until Jack had broken through to him. Will held his head and took a deep breath, well he tried, but it felt as though he only had half of his lungs. "Do I need to call Lecter?" Jack asked as he managed to place a hand on the side of Will's arm, but Will jerked back out of the well minded grasp and he shook his head. Any out-side touch felt like thousands of needles pressing into his skin at the moment as a heavy electric buzz coated his body. He only needed space to try and contained himself and quiet the high buzz.

"No, those no need to call him," Will finally managed to speak, he almost winced at how agitated he sounded as he tried ground himself. "I just need a moment to gather my thoughts that's all." Will mumbled as he ran both hands over his face as he tried to quiet the buzz of negative emotions that ran wild through his mind and body. He missed the skeptical look Jack was giving him that no doubt would have told Will that he was not going to listen to what he had just said.

"Alright." Jack took a step back to give the other some space and waited until Will was ready to deal with what he was just told. Will took a deep breath again and the cold air of the autumn morning was enough to stretch out all of his lungs as he tried to gather his thoughts like he told Jack. But it was hard to gather something that felt like it was made of a million jagged pieces that slipped out of his grasp while also cutting his palms.

"You believe Miranda's the Black Widow, don't you." Will finally spoke his voice was hollow, he did not look at Jack, but more at his fedora when he spoke. The sentence felt like acid on his tongue, making his throat burn more than it already had, but even though the statement was painful to make, it had to be made. *That's why you were being so vague with her, not telling her why you want her to come down to Quantico with you. That way you can get the jump on her, catch her off guard. Along with preventing her from contacting her lawyer right away. It's also why you don't want me here, because the last thing you want is my emotions getting in the way of your need for justice.*

Jack let out another heavy breath, clearly wishing he wasn't having this conversation with Will, someone who knew all the tricks, all the angles, someone who could easily get *hurt*. "Wouldn't you." He simply stated and what was more revealing to Will was the first response

that popped into his mind was *yes*. Because though he did not want to, he took a step back and looked at Miranda like she was another profile, another mind to slip into and play dress up with. Doing that made those jagged pieces slowly rattle and come together. Because yes Miranda did fit into the profile he had created, she fit so perfectly well, it was almost dizzying. She was naturally flirtatious, she could command a room with simple words, she easily played towards others good sides and used it. She knew when to strike and how to, the list of similarities was beginning to feel endless. The more Will looked at the list the more he felt a grip on his chest tighten and his heartbeat quicken.

Stop it Graham, before you spiral in front of Jack, then no doubt he'll end up phoning Lecter. Besides a hand full of people out there fall in to the profile like Miranda's. Will felt a little relief when that small string of doubt crossed his mind. It wasn't a lot, it felt like a glass of water poured on a roaring fire, but it was enough to help take out some of the building flames. But deep-down Will knew this sliver of reassurance lased denial was only his own desperation. An attempt to protect himself from the possible harmful truth that waited for him like a predator in stalking.

"Alright," Miranda spoke her voice hard as she presented herself in a more serious manner. Will turned away from Jack to watch Miranda walk down the stairs, dressed in a simple white blouse with flared sleeves, tucked tightly into charcoal-colored slacks as she rummaged through her matching hand bag. "Let's get all this straightened out as soon as possible." She looked up from her handbag and over at Will, her face softened in an instant as a look of concern washed over her once harden features. "Is everything alright sweetheart?" She asked her voice soft and soothing and Will wished, no at this point it felt like begging that the soothing effect would help his scrambled feelings. He opened his mouth to say something, anything to her, that would voice what he was feeling. He expected to see those jumbling thoughts come pouring out of his mouth as soon as he unhinged his jaw, but there was nothing. His voice was gone. Luckily Jack decided to step in, either to save Will from answering the stinging question, or to hurry things along.

"Come with me Miss. Rhettford, the sooner we are down at the Bureau the sooner we can get all this straightened out." Jack spoke as he once again reached his hand out towards Miranda. Who looked down at the seemingly harmless hand then over at Will, with wide confusion filled eyes. Waiting for him to say something to her.

"I'll meet you down there," Will finally spoke as he reached and placed a hand on the side of her arm. "I promise, this will all be straightened out." *Liar* the word stung and Will had to keep himself from flinching as he added with what he hoped was a reassuring smile. It was hard to tell, because his facial muscles felt as though they did not want to do anything, but go lack and leave him with a blank slate. He watched as Miranda's eyes searched his facial expression; it felt like a drill digging into his skin as she searched for something that he knew might not actually be there. After a few drawn out moments Miranda nodded her head, without saying another word towards Will, she turned and began to walk out the door.

Will stood on the now abandoned porch watching as Jack drove off with Miranda in the back seat of his black SUV. Though Will said he would meet Miranda down at the Bureau what he really wanted was to go with them, be there as they drove off. But the look Jack had sent him when he dared to step off the porch after Miranda had locked her door, it was enough to leave

him where he stood. He knew better than to challenge it, it was enough that Jack didn't say anything when Will brought up meeting them down there. So, he was not going to push his luck. Instead he just stood there silently on the porch watching the car became smaller and smaller in the distance. Before letting out a heavy breath and once again ran a hand over his face. *Think Graham, could this be true, could Miranda actually be the Black Widow. Jack thinks so and the profile aligns. God damnit Graham think!* He felt himself slipping again, but before he could fall into a full-on spiral, he felt something brush up against his leg. Will removed his hand from his face and looked down at his feet to see a very familiar black and white cat brushing up against his legs. Its eyes closed in contentment as it continued to rub against Will.

"Hey." Will's voice was soft and strained as he watched as the cat continued to brush across him going one way then turning around to go the other. Clear it wasn't going to stop until it had all of Will's attention. It was hard to voice it to the cat, but something else already stole all of his attention for the day at it wasn't even ten yet. But that didn't stop him from leaning down and extending his hand out, letting the stray rub its head against his open palm. Before the cat lazily moved so that now the top of its back was rubbing against his hand. Its soft fur felt nice under his touch and the small spurts of purrs helped ease his clustered mind and battling emotions. Nearly drawing a smile to the profiler's face. "Glad you're having a better morning than I am." Will slowly began to pet the cat fully, fingers lightly running through the black fur, feeling the tiny bumps of spine under his finger tips and now and again its long tail would wrap itself around his wrist. Soon the cat had its fill on Will's attention and began to walk off, in a quick pace leaving Will once more alone.

"Speaking of mornings." Will mumbled to himself as he reached into his suit jacket pocket and pulled out his phone. There was no way he was going straight home, he told Miranda he was going to meet her down there soon and that was what he was going to do. He just needed to send out a quick text to one of if not the only neighbor he'd leave in charge of his pack when he was away. A sweet woman, who lived a short drive further down the road. She lived more into the middle of nowhere than he did. The only reason the two actually ever met was because her yellow Volkswagen beetle had broken down near his house and Will offered his assistance as best, he could to get the small car started. After the act it seemed to have cemented their neighborly bond with one another. They often exchanged greeting, along with small updates on life whenever they crossed paths, she offered to watch his dogs when he was on the road and in return, he did the same with her two cats and one parroket. Along with other stereotypical neighboring habits that might happen.

As Will pulled out his phone he noticed two text notifications on his lock screen. "That's odd." Will mumbled as he unlocked his phone to see who the texts could be from, first Will wasn't all that surprised to see the oldest one was from Hannibal, wishing him a good night and a safe drive back home. Along with a sly remark of not being all too thrilled with the night ending early. The newest text though was a bit more of a surprise. It was a text from Beverly giving him a heads up that Jack was headed towards Miranda's house after they found the banking information and had a few interviews with some of her employees. Will looked down to see when the text was sent and was a bit surprised to see that it was sent nearly half an hour before Jack had arrived.

Why didn't my phone go off? Will thought as he searched through his phone and noticed that it was placed on silent. Will stared down at his phone with a quizzical expression. *When did I put my phone on silent, I never put my phone on silent. Unless I did last night before Lecter's dinner and I can't remember.* Will quickly shook off the trail of thoughts that he found himself wondering on. *Focus Graham now is not the time to think about your phone just ask Quinn to check on the dogs and head over to Quantico, before Jack starts to drill into Miranda.*

Will tried to compose himself as he nearly stormed down the hallway leading to the interrogation room. Not caring how other's saw him as he quickly walked down the hall, nearly bumping into a few lingering agents that were caught in his path. Some sending him looks of annoyance when he didn't offer them an apology. But those cold stares ment nothing to him as he was dealing with his own rampaging mind and thumping pulse as Will continued down his path. His mind was a crowded mess, thoughts of different personalities colliding together, like crashing boulders. Exploding on impact and scattering across his mind. Two personalities at war with each other, fighting to be heard the loudest as the battled for dominance grew. One was his federal side, that kept bring up the connections, the similarities, that wanted justice. The other was his partner side, that wanted all those things to be wrong, bringing up possible doubt and didn't care for the case at all. The two sides fought like wild animals inside his mind all tooth and claws, as they tried to come out on top. It made his head pulse in pain, Will wanted to cover his ears, and scream at them to stop and shut up. Leave his mind so he could actually think clearly.

"I was wondering when you'd show up." Beverly wasn't at all surprised to see Will push open the viewing room door, she actually suspected it to happen sooner or later. His eyes were trained on the one-way viewing mirror, not giving the agent a second glance as he stood next to her.

"Has Jack started the interrogation?" Will's voice was monotone, but it still had a bite to it, to sharpen the edge, clear he was attempting to hold his emotions at bay. He crossed his arms over his chest as he continued to stare into the interrogation room. Where Miranda sat patiently, her hands clasped together resting on the metal table, her eyes never staying in one place as they looked around the bleak room. Miranda let out a deep breath before she reached out to mindless adjust her handbag that sat next to her on the table. She looked calm, but at the same time there was a fidgeting emotion that would pass through her. Breaking that calm demeanor for a moment, before it would return as she waited for whoever to came through the door.

"Not yet, you know how he likes to let them stew in the room for a while. Build up their anxiety and all that crap." Will knew the tactic, seen it done a countless number of times while working with the FBI and when he was a detective, have the suspect sit in silence for as long as possible, until they turn their own thoughts on to themselves. Have their own paranoia turn on them, to the point not even their own mind was a promising escape. Sometimes it worked well, all the interrogator had to do was walk in after a few more minutes and the person would confess, other times it had the opposite effect. The perpetrator, would end up thinking of their own strategy to use against them. That was the issue when it came to the well-known strategy, not every mind was the same and not every mind was going to turn on its owner. "How you holding up?" Beverly asked with honest concern in her tone

as she looked over at Will, whose expression was blank as he continued to stare through the one-way mirror. His eyes flickering around as he took in the sight of Miranda on the other side, wondering if she believed him when he told her that he was going to be there.

Will shook his head slightly and let out a deep breath, still not looking over at her. “My girlfriend is about to be interrogated by my boss,” he bit his bottom lip, “so can’t say I’m holding up all that well.”

“That’s what I thought,” Beverly sighed and turned her attention in front of her, knowing she wasn’t going to get a face-to-face conversation with Will. “I mean if it was my partner on the other side of this, I wouldn’t exactly be able to sit idly by.” She looked over at Will once more, her eyes roaming over him, he looked like he was trying to hold himself together as best as he could. Giving off a stone still composer, if it wasn’t for his flickering eyes and breathing, he might have been mistaken as a statue.

“Trust me I don’t think I can for much longer.” Will said through gritted teeth, as he felt his patience running low and for a moment it felt like he was the one stewing and not Miranda.

The door to the interrogation room opened with silence, the sudden movement had all three of those who waited reacting in their own way. Will silently jerked as he turned his attention away from Miranda, Beverly coolly refocused her attention on who was about to enter, and Miranda for the first time since Will had laid eyes on her when he entered, fully moved her body as she rose to her feet. Everyone watched as Jack; who carried a file in his hand, walked into the room in silence. Another tactic at play, not giving the suspect anything to go one, hard to read someone’s emotions if they don’t show any. Is he mad, is he relaxed, will this be simple, or will this be like pulling teeth, hard to tell, hard to work with or against.

“Agent Crawford, mind finally explaining to me what is going on here?” Miranda asked as she watched as the agent made his way over to the table and took the seat in front of her.

“Please sit-down Miss. Rhettford.” Jack’s voice was a false calm as he motioned for her to take the chair again. Miranda slightly narrowed her eyes at the man, clear she wanted to refuse the soft command. But Miranda let out a deep sigh, before she complied to the command disguised as a request and sat down. The two sat in silence for a few more long minutes, Miranda staring at Jack, while Jack had his attention on the folder. His fingers running through its content, not paying her any mind as though she wasn’t even there to begin with it.

“There I sat, now will you explain to me why you showed up at my house early in the morning and escorted me down here?” Will could her the strain in her voice as she grew impatient with the act that Jack was putting on.

No, don’t be the one to show your emotions first. Will thought as he watched Miranda’s agitation towards the silent act grow as her patience for the agent diminished. *That’s what he wants, to see you agitative, to see you on edge. While he seems like there is all the time in the world and you feel like yours is running out.*

Jack set down the file and clasped his hands on the table as he finally looked at Miranda square on for the first time since he had entered the room. “Tell me Miss. Rhettford, what do

you know about the recent murders committed by the Black Widow?"

Miranda slowly leaned back in her chair; her eyes slightly wide as she tried to comprehend the question that was asked. "Not all that much if I am to be perfectly honest. Just the little information that I manage to catch here and there," Will felt an odd sense of relief that Miranda didn't mention that he was the one to tell her about the case. That would only bring in more of that unwelcome storm that Jack dragged behind him when he was on the prowl for justice. They were already caught in its path, Will less than Miranda at that point, if he could use it to help her keep cover from the raging wind and striking lightning then he would. "That she is someone who is luring wealthy men to unsavory motels with the promise of one night of passion only to end with her killing them. That is all." Miranda answered fully. Another wave of relief ran over Will as he took in Miranda's statement.

Good, you revealed even less information than what I originally told you. I don't know if your ignorance is real or not Miranda, but use it either way. While Jack is searching for a moment to strike and take you down in a single blow. Starve his hunger for justice while you can and don't show a weak spot.

Jack leaned back in his chair and slowly scratched under his chin, Will knew this move all too well, it was like watching a snake coil back. "That's all you know, is it?" He asked, "You don't even know the identity of these individuals?" Jack made a nonchalant movement with his hands, to appear as if it was a simple conversation that they were having. "I mean even the press released three of the four identities."

Miranda shook her head. "Like I said, I don't know much on the case, I don't know who those men were and I tend to stay away from watching the news, especially when the news involves murder." Miranda crossed her arms around herself, closing herself off from him as though she seen through Jack's disguise of open conversation for what it really was and started to prepare herself for the strike. "So, I honestly don't know what this has to do with *me*."

Jack nodded his head as though he understood what Miranda had told him before he quickly shot forward, hands loudly bracing themselves on the metal table. The quick movement and loud thump of flesh hitting metal not only had Will jumping, but Miranda as well. Seeing Miranda jump like that had Will's protective instincts take full hold of his mind as he felt the uncontrollable urge to rush out of the room and into the interrogation room. Put himself between Jack and Miranda, so the other man's fangs bit into him and not her. But though he felt like the urge was uncontrollable, Will managed to find himself standing completely still. Perhaps it was because he was in the company of Beverly and her own cool demeanor had found a nook inside of Will that held him from moving, or another small part that had the strength to fight the urge knew better than to run in there. Because if he did that storm would turn into hell fire in an instant and that was something nether himself nor Miranda needed.

"Then tell me why did all three of these men have one singular connection," Jack's voice wasn't booming, but the thunder behind it was building up as he pulled out all three of the men's photos. "That connection being you, Miss. Rhettford." The pictures slid on the table, stopping in front of Miranda, who took in a breath of surprise as she looked down at the pictures of all three men, all three slain men. Not their head shots received from their license,

not old photos given to them from friends and family, but photos of how they were found. Naked laying spread eagle on some worn-out queen-size bed with the only covering they had was their own dried blood. Miranda covered her mouth at the sight of the gore filled pictures, her head flinched a little as her natural reaction was to turn away.

You bastard. Will thought with rising anger as he watched as Miranda recoiled from the sight of the crime scene photos. He felt his hands tighten around his forearms, blunt nails digging into clothed flesh as he felt the need to bang on the mirror. In order to keep himself from actually speaking the words he thought Will bit his tongue, to the point he felt the muscle scream in pain and threaten to give under his sharp bite. *You didn't have to show her those pictures. Where these men are seen covered in blood, their faces frozen in an endless scream as they are put on display. You only did that so you could get a reaction out of her, a reaction you thought fit for your viewing. Who cares if you end up inflicting nightmares am I right, all in the name of justice.*

"All three of these men, were clients of yours Miss. Rhettford, some even did business with you on more than one occasion." Jack tapped sharply on each and every one of the photos. "So, tell me again that you know nothing about the Black Widow murders." Jack leaned forward with each syllable that came from his mouth, drilling as hard as he could into her. Miranda's eyes snapped upwards away from the photos and her eyes turned cold in near seconds as soon as they looked away from the brutal display. The newly formed icicle laced stare pointed harshly towards Jack and her expression harden as she gathered herself with ease. Once again showing off how easy it was for her to switch her emotions around, put herself back together and protect the sides of herself that were left open for an attack.

"If I must repeat myself Agent Crawford, then I will," Miranda's voice was equally as stern as Jack's. "I know little of these gruesome events that happen. Yes, these men are, I mean were clients of mine. But so are nearly over half of the men that are just in this state alone. So if that little piece of information is all you have then I believe you have wasted both of our time." Her words were cold as she also leaned forward, challenging Jack's stance with her own. Even going as far as taking the photos of the men that still laid in front of her and sliding them back over to the agent. At that point Will regretted ever wondering what might have happened if those two interacted with their more prominent personalities on display.

"That's what you think Miss. Rhettford," Jack's voice was low "not only do you stand as a singular link between all three of these men, but you also seemed to fit into the profile that was made for our murder. You are a very well-known business woman, upper class citizen, liked by most in the social groups you travel in and very desirable by most men." Will watched a micro expression travel over Miranda's face. An expression that would be followed by the sound of a scoff if she wasn't keeping herself held together in front of Jack as he continued to describe the profile made of the Black Widow. Throwing in some aspects that fit into Miranda more than what was said about the murder. "Someone who must have interacted with these men countless of times, maybe was even invited to a party of theirs or two. You got to know them, see them for who they really were and you didn't like who was in front of you did you? So you decided to punish these men, humiliate them the only way you thought fit. By mutilating their bodies and killing them."

Miranda rolled her eyes and shook her head; she crossed one leg over the other before she turned her attention back to Jack. “That’s some tale you have there, Agent Crawford, but the problem with that is that I’d have to get close to my cliental in order to be invited into their social graces.” Jack raised an eyebrow towards the comment and a look of intrigue ran across his features.

“And what do you mean by that Miss. Rhettford, when I asked a few of your employees they said you had an almost flirtatious manner when it came to your male clients.” He pointed out as he clasped his hands together and adjusted himself in his seat, Miranda let out a breath as she slowly shook her head and pressed her fingers to her forehead before looking over at Jack.

“Of course they would say that, hell ask Will about my flirtatious behaver and he’ll let you know that it’s all a simple act. A ploy I put on for those men, so I can get some decent information out of them and insure they came back,” Miranda took a deep breath as she calmed herself down. “But all that is an act and when it comes down to actually doing business with my clients, I have one maybe even two meetings with them at the most. We discuss the price, their vision of what they want, and the estimated time it would take,” Miranda shifted herself as she leaned forward onto the table her own hands clasped together. “Though I do say I know everything about my clients and that there is some bond between each and every one of them. In reality it’s not true I do the basic interactions, of course if they need an additional meeting with me, I’ll oblige. Besides that I leave them to.” Miranda trailed off as a soft look of realization began to crawl over her features. “Brittney.” The name came out low, softer than a whisper as a vacant stare filled Miranda’s eyes.

“Who’s Brittney?” Beverly asked as she turned towards Will with an arched eyebrow. Will blinked a few times as he played around with the name in his mind for a few seconds. He lowered his arms and turned his head slightly towards Beverly. Not fully turning away from the one-way mirror, but giving her the knowledge that he had his attention pointed her way.

“Brittney, she’s Miranda’s assistant.” Will answered as he began to recall all information he had of the young woman. Beverly cocked her head to the side, a sign she wanted Will to continue because just stating that Brittney worked for Miranda wasn’t going to help fill the void. Will caught the signal and turned more of his body towards Beverly and let out a heavy breath. “I’ve met her more than once, the best I can do to describe her is clingy, eager to please, and she comes off as very submissive. She also has an issue with personal boundaries that Miranda tried to put in place.” Will fully answered, Beverly nodded her head as his loose recap of the newly introduced woman’s profile sunk into her thoughts. Will slowly turned himself back to mirror and placed his finger to his mouth as he began to contemplate. *What does Brittney have to do with this, she does somewhat fit the profile of the Black Widow. Someone who comes off as submissive and if these men were looking for younger women, then she would also fit as well. Along with her hair matching the strand found at the latest crime scene. But I don’t see her being anything other than that, submissive.*

“What was that, Miss. Rhettford?” Miranda blinked a few times before she recollected herself and her attention was once more given to Jack.

“Brittney, Brittney Wilts she’s my assistant, or technically was my assistant. I had to suspend her a few days ago.” Miranda sighed as she ran a hand through her hair giving off a built up feeling of unease, as she looked for a way to semi distract herself by moving one of her hands. Giving her some soothing effect by the action.

“And what exactly did this Brittney Wilts do for you?” Jack probed, clear that his attention was slowly beginning to shift away from the accusations he had in place. As a new piece of information was gradually being introduced to him.

“She did the typical assistant work.” Miranda began to wring her hands together, “taking calls, organizing meetings, dealing with my clients when I had no time, along with other tasks just to name a few.” Jack nodded his head and tapped his index finger to his chin.

“She sounds as though she was a very capable worker,” Jack shifted again, his body looked like it was more relaxed and opened to a simpler less provoking conversation. “Tell me why you had to suddenly suspend her.”

“Though she was very good at her job, she was also very I don’t know how to put this. She was very obsessed with pleasing me. Always calling me up at odd hours, even when asked not to. In order to make sure even the simplest of tasks were done correctly, she had this tendency to follow me around like a duckling and at one point she obscenely stuck her nose into my relationship with Will. Tried to stir the pot as the saying goes.” Miranda rubbed her shirt sleeve between her index finger and thumb. “It was all too much and I had to suspend her for the time being.” She added not looking up at Jack, but at what her fingers were doing. Will took notice of the look Beverly sent him through his peripheral vision and he internally groaned at the expression the other had pointed towards him.

“It’s a long story.” Will mumbled as he pinched the bridge of his nose and squeezed his eyes close. He couldn’t tell if the physical response was because he was tired of everything that had happened, now to pile that little tidbit of possible gossip on top of it was wearing him thin. Or it could be caused by possible embarrassment. Even trying to distinguish the two possibilities was just too tiring for him at this point.

“One that you better tell me as soon as this,” Beverly gestured towards the interrogation room with her hand, before she went back to her stance of having her arms folded. “Is over.” Will didn’t have it in him to actually respond and he could tell that was all Beverly needed out of him, before she returned her attention back to the others.

“Alright, so Miss Wilts has some boundary issues,” Jack leaned back in his chair and draped on arm over the back rest, once again playing into the more casual approach. Obvious that he learned that if he pushed against Miranda, instead of falling over like most who got in the way of the shove, she would push back. Soon they would be in a shoving match and end up going in a circle trying to get the other onto the ground. “But what does she have to do with all this?”

“Because, if anyone knows anything about these men, it would be her.” Miranda clarified as she stopped rubbing her sleeve and looked over towards Jack, waiting for him to respond, waiting to see if he might see the connections.

“She might be onto something.” Beverly said and Will turned his head to look over at her with a quirked eyebrow, waiting for her to continue. “I mean this Brittney character, the way you described her, whatever way she tried to stir something up between you and Miranda, plus the obvious personal boundary issues she has in place. It could be that jealousy aspect you came up with earlier.” Will fully turned away from the mirror for the first time since entering the room.

“What are you saying that maybe Brittney, killed these men because she watched Miranda “flirt” with them and was jealous?” The idea sounded far fetch to him, the way the theory slid off his tongue left an oily residue behind. It did not feel right.

“Think about it, I mean it could have been jealousy all along and that disgust theory you had still can work along with it. Plus she might have been angry not at these men, but at Miranda for showing attention to them and not her. Also we just heard that Miranda had to suspend her a while ago, that too can play into that lack of control aspect you picked up at the John Doe crime scene.” It made some muddled sense the more Beverly pointed it out, but somewhere in the back of Will’s mind, a part that did not feel right with the jealousy aspect from the beginning, but only played nice because the profile was still up in the air, the part that hated that list of past lovers with each reading of the name. That portion of his mind felt agitated with this new way of thinking. It raised it hackles the more it thought about it and wanted Will to turn it down.

But what if she is right. Came a smooth thought, that spoke a volume a touch louder than the other part of his mind. *What if it was jealousy and disgust mixing together to form a type of amalgamation that had my empathy fooled. That’s why it rubbed me the wrong way, felt like sandpaper against my mind every time I thought about it.* It felt all too confusing for him, he wanted to believe that train of thought, but something told him as soon as he stepped on that locomotive, there would be no getting off of it and he wasn’t fully convinced. Which felt so jarring for him as well, because wasn’t he supposed to go towards any possible theory that pointed away from Miranda? Wasn’t that the right thing to do, so why did it feel wrong?

A sudden hard knock, jerked Will out of his clouded thoughts and he quickly looked up to see Jack standing at the mirror, before motioning with his head for the two to exit the room and meet him out in the hall. Beverly sent Will a look, before she walked out of the room with him following behind her.

“What do you think?” Was the first thing Jack said as he exited the interrogation room, he didn’t really point the question to either one of them fully, neither answered right away. Will didn’t know if he could actually answer the blatant question anyway, because his mind was once again scrambling around, fighting itself for dominance.

What do you want me to think Jack, that this could be a lead, that you should take what Miranda said and roll with it. Go down to wherever Brittney lives and search around, because she is the Black Widow and not my girlfriend. Or do you want me to agree with your first speculation, that Miranda is actually the Black Widow because she fits one side of the profile, like how Brittney might be able to fit the other. Well I’m sorry Jack, I can’t point you in the right direction right off the bat, because my mind and heart are at war with themselves at the moment.

“I think before we put Miranda in a cell and throw away the key, we should go talk to Brittney at least. Check her out for ourselves. Because this could be a case of drastic obsessive behavior.” Beverly answered and Jack nodded his head, agreeing with what she had said. “We also have that hair we found at the crime scene; we should also think about comparing DNA as well.”

“Will,” Jack spoke and Will straightened his stance mentally preparing himself for a more pointed question, “is Miss Wilts a brunette by any chance?” Will nodded his head in confirmation, suddenly it felt difficult to actually use his words, not quite confident on what might spill out if he did open his mouth. He was just glad Jack had asked him a simple yes or no question. “Alright, that might settle it. Beverly, I want you and Zeller to go question Miss Wilts, try to bring her in if you can, maybe even try to look around without rising to much suspicion. I’ll go back in there,” Jack motioned back to the interrogation room with his head, “and see if I can get Miss Rhettford to agree with a DNA comparison.” Beverly nodded her head, before she walked off.

“Maybe I should go in there, Jack.” Will said finally able to find his words, and had some confidence that they weren’t going to be a congealed mess as they left him. “She’ll be more cooperative if I was the one to ask her.” It was a long shot to actually being able to get into the room and have a conversation with Miranda. To check in on her and make sure she was holding herself together. Though Will knew Miranda was capable of holding herself together under a large amount of pressure, there was nothing that measured quite as close to the distinguish amount a pressure brought on by a murder charge.

“Sorry Will, I can’t let you do that.” Jack replied as he folded his arms and shook his head. It almost seemed liked it pained him somewhat to actually turn the agent down.

“And why is that?” Will mirrored the other by also crossing his arm and adjusting his stance to be more assertive. Will had held his tongue long enough. He played nice when Jack showed up that morning and escorted Miranda away, he held himself together through the interrogation though nearly every ounce of him wanted to make some noise at one point or another. Through all that he felt his patience slowly diminish with each tick of the clock, now that he stood in front of the man, Will felt his patience no longer existed. He no longer felt the need to play nice anymore, he was tired of all that was happening and he needed to grab a hold of something to give him some form of control in it all. Because as soon as Miranda had opened her front door that morning Will felt like he had none.

“Because Will as of today, you are officially too close and we can’t risk how this might affect you.” Jack replied, his voice was hard and his tone was twined with a volume of warning. Reminding Will who he was talking to in the first place. “I want you to back off until we can sort all this out.” Will let out a scoff, rolled his eyes and dropped his arms.

“Of all the times to,” Will sucked in his bottom lip and bit down into the flesh hard enough to threaten busting the skin for moment. Gathering himself as he tried to keep his near boiling irritation in check. “You and I both know that’s never stopped you before.” He had no problems pointing out the flaw in Jack’s logic. If the man was comfortable putting him in the field as much as possible with the blaring threat of mental damage done to Will. Then he had no leg to stand on when it came to trying to follow the guidelines at the moment. Jack did not

say a word, he just narrowed his eyes at Will and Will did the same back to him. A soundless standoff was taking place, both unique forms of stubbornness colliding together, bouncing off only to regain balance and collided again. Neither one of them willing to back down at the moment, while they mentally prepared themselves for whatever form of an argument that will no doubt take place as soon as one of them breathed out a single syllable.

“Don’t think for a second that I won’t remove you from this case entirely and send you back to your classroom. Professor Graham.” Jack was the first to speak, to break the tension filled place with a sledgehammer. The way his tittle and last name came out of the head agent’s mouth, reminding the other man what his actual status was when it came to his temporary place among the real agents made the hairs on the back of Will’s neck rise, like one of his dogs when they were threated. If Will felt any more like one of his canine companions than he would have let out a growl as well. Instead he felt the edge of his lip threat to twitch as it hinted on becoming a snarl. It was an awful low blow that Jack had struck and it had Will’s slow rising anger come to a full-on boil as he felt the match of anger strike and take flame.

“Now that is.” Will was cut off, when he felt a heavy hand placed on his right shoulder. Grounding him in place in a near instant effect. Stopping him mid step forward, finger already raised and pointed, ready to challenge Jack even more. Instead the hand had stopped him in his tracks before the act could fully take place, leaving the profiler a bit confused on why this unknown hand had such an effect. That was before he snapped his head to look over his shoulder to see none other than Hannibal Lecter standing behind him, his hand laying claim onto Will’s shoulder. His cool demeanor easily engulfed the growing fire of Will’s anger. Will lowered his hand and continued to stare at Hannibal, the annoying fuzz that was his mind slowly fizzing out. Giving way to a calm that Will wanted since that morning’s events. It had him feeling confused if anything else, onto why this odd calming effect was taking place rather quickly. All because of a solid hand on his shoulder and the micro expression of what Will could see as concern, or perhaps something disguised as the emotion placed on Hannibal’s face. To trick his mind and the rampant emotions that waged war in him all morning.

“Will, I believe it’s in both parties best interest if you take a step back for the time being.” Hannibal voiced, looking at him then casting a look towards Jack, and all though the initial calming effect brought on by the gesture of placing his hand on Will’s shoulder had taken some root into the others psyche, it did not fully reach all of him. There was still a small burning fire of frustration clinging to life, in a far corner that no one could touch. Barely out of reach, no matter how strenuous the stretch was, the flame was always a fingertip’s brush away.

Well it looks like Uncle Jack has called in your handler. And at the moment the small barely hanging on to life flame decided to flicker, reminding Will of his frustration pointed in all directions. The agitated flicker had Will jerking his shoulder out from under Hannibal’s calming touch. He did not say a word, but the blistering emotion that was held into his stern glare spoke a volume that could surpass any raised voice. The two men only watched as Will walked off with his agitation commanding his movements.

Hannibal did enjoy the show of watching Will walk off in his anger filled pace, he could practically see the rising storm the brewed behind the younger man. Talking shape in thick

dark clouds and with thin strips of lightning flashing as his feet acted as the thunder with each step. He almost played with the idea of not interrupting as soon as he did, now that would have been a proper show. Watching Will bite into Jack's neck with every sharpen word that cascaded out of his mouth. The fiery fury that would have been born into those already tantalizing eyes of his would have been beautiful. But then again though Will's always restrained anger and frustration being let out was a delight, Jack's more renowned and present rough emotions were not. No, those were an annoyance to be the audience of and Hannibal was not in the proper mood to watch the show.

Jack let out his own frustrated laced huff as he pinched the bridge of his nose, Hannibal turned his attention from watching Will practically storm off and over to the head agent with a well-placed curious gaze. As if he did not know what could be troubling the agent in the slightest. "I'm glad you can see it my way Doctor Lecter." Jack breathed out as he lowered his hand to properly look at the psychiatrist.

"I only want what's best for Will, Jack." Hannibal simply stated, reminding the other that he was not actually agreeing with him. Whatever side Jack believed there was, Hannibal was as far away from the proper one, the man only stood on the side that brought him the better form of entertainment, that was the side he was truly on. But he did like to give off the illusion that he was on Will's side at all times. "If that means it's in his best interest; though he might not see it at the time, to take a step back before his emotions can place a thick veil over his eyes then so be it." Jack rubbed his hand over his face, as he tried to arrange his emotions, to keep them in check while in front of a person who truly had no other reason to be there except to check in on Will.

"Anyway, I'm glad you showed up when you did. This case was already straining enough, now we have to deal with the fact that it's now hitting close to home for Will." Jack slid his hands in his pockets and shook his head. "Hell, it's practically living there." There was clear irritation in his words as he gestured vaguely with one hand before he glanced over to the interrogation room door and that free hand ran over his mouth. "You think I did the right idea by benching Will, don't you Doctor Lecter?" Of course Jack would be looking for confirmation from Hannibal, the man was not at all that surprised by the sudden rise of self-doubt that always played at the agent's mind when it came to dealing with Will.

Hannibal let out a breath, as if he too was feeling some form of turmoil when it came to the decision that they both made towards Will. Except where Jack's feelings were real, Hannibal's were just an illusion to put forward for others. "I cannot properly tell you how to run your team, Jack. But if we are both looking for what will suit the best outcome for Will, it was a well minded decision." Hannibal answered and Jack seemed to take in the words with greed soothing his conscience. Just the way Hannibal intended them to do so.

"Alright, well I'm going to go back in there, to see if I can get Miss. Rhettford to agree with a DNA analysis. Something tells me if she is so eager to prove her innocence it shouldn't be that hard in doing so." Jack reached for the doorknob, but Hannibal caught the hesitation to complete the actions, that was when the man turned back to Hannibal. "Maybe you should observe this next interaction, Doctor." The suggestion surprisingly caught Hannibal by surprise. Something that rarely happened and when it did, it was mostly done by Will and of lately by Miranda herself. Who to Hannibal's own twisted delight sat on the other side of the

door with such a heavy charge hanging over her head like a sharpen guillotine. Ready to come down at any moment and sever her neck. “Perhaps your expertise can pick up something about her, that she is hiding from us.”

“If my expertise can help provide an assistance than I am more than willing to oblige.”

Hannibal did not miss the fleeting expression that dropped lightly from Miranda’s face once the door was opened and she laid her already cold stare on Jack as he reentered the room. While Hannibal himself stood invisible in the viewing room, if he focused more on his other senses, he could pick up the remnants of Will and Beverly that still lingered in the cold desolate room. He could still pick up the soft fragrant of Beverly’s oceanic hair care product that mixed with whatever full body perfume she applied that balanced between soft oriental and hard earth. Then there was the more prominent smell that was Miranda’s home that hung heavy in the air. That had clung sticky to Will’s skin and dared to mix itself with the other’s own scent that was already ruined by that cologne that the woman had gifted him.

Hannibal had to fight off the sickly disgruntled hard form of jealousy that side swept him when he laid his eyes on the profiler for the first time that day. Seeing the man wearing last evenings clothes and catching the soft floral fragrance that was a poor attempt to play off of cherry blossoms, that probably came from whatever bodywash the woman owned. Had that once thought of dealt jealousy raising its pestilence-soaked head and stretching out it’s snapping limbs as it reawakened inside of him and began to attack at his insides. Grabbing hold of his senses with its grime dripping claws and squeezing them as the infectious stream of envy poured into his bloodstream. Tainting his veins and contaminating the rest of his body in the process. Leaving him feeling the cool harsh flame of perhaps insult, but he wasn’t quite sure if that was what he felt when he had approached Will. Well that was what he first thought, until he seen the *mark*. An obnoxious amethyst hue that was already showing signs of yellowing that laid with near pale skin of Will’s neck. Corrupting skin that was only his to damage in ways that he saw fit. The bite battled against the deep blue of the dress shirt and the only reason it was seen in the first place was because Will had turned his head and the hold Hannibal hand on his shoulder caused the shirt to open slightly.

So, that was what came of your evening Will, why you and Rhettford had to depart so early and why you could not return my text. You finally succumbed to the that lowly feeling of attraction you have for Miranda and submerged yourself in to it fully. Even after that ruse she pulled with having to depart early, you felt it was right to basically reword her trickery with such an animalistic act, how crude of you to do so. Though all fault can’t be placed on your shoulders, you are human after all and there is no doubt that Miranda made it all too easy for you to act upon even the basic human need. I wonder did she spread her legs easily for you, make it hard for you to refuse such an open invitation. Just like when she cornered you in the bathroom.

Though Hannibal felt like his self-control was once again tested and it had the man wondering what deity found enjoyment of putting him through so many challenges. He was rewarded in the end with being able to watch behind the one-way mirror, instead of being asked to go after Will like he had initially thought was going to be asked of him. He could still feel that dark form of joy that had invaded his mind that morning after receiving the unexpected call from Jack. When he had first faced the call, all he felt was a sense of

annoyance as he still tried to properly deal with his straining feelings from the previous night's dinner party he had set up. Where he was a mix of trampled pride and displeasure. Agitated that his initial plan to throw Miranda into a space that was all his, where he could pull the strings and have her dancing for him had been turned into a double edge sward that he had no choice, but to grip until the sharp blade cut into his palm. But the healing sting was soothed with that simple phone call, as those emotions were easily replaced with one.

Now that one emotion was gorging itself as he watched the small interaction between Jack and Miranda take place in front him. What could have made the show even more appetizing would be if Miranda knew that he was watching it all happen. Then that would be a proper feast for him to nourish himself with. The look on the woman's face if that knowledge were to ever be spoken would have made all that he had felt earlier be nonexistent.

"You want to take a sample of my DNA to compare it to a hair you found at a murder scene. Is that correct." Miranda tilted her head and her eyes searched over Jack's face, as though she was looking for some hidden agenda that really wasn't there. But the paranoia was warranted none the less.

"Yes, all we'll do is a simple cheek swab, send it the lab, and compare it to the strand of DNA. If they don't match, you'll be able to walk out of here in no time." Jack replied, there was an obvious stark contrast to his behavior from earlier. Once again playing into the calmer and more fake friendly way that would slowly have Miranda lowering her guard. Yet Miranda still looked at him as though at any moment the man from before would come back and threaten to bite her. Miranda narrowed her eyes and pursed her lips.

"I'll agree to your little test on one condition." Once again Miranda showed her hidden talent of taking Hannibal off guard. He was sure the woman would jump at the chance to prove herself innocent. So, why hadn't she, this was going to be an interesting chain of events.

"Miss. Rhettford, you do realize the accusations against you, you are in no position to be making demands." Jack replied.

"Oh I do understand completely Agent Crawford," Miranda tilted her head the other direction. "I also understand that I was brought here with little to no knowledge of the reason why, held in this room for who knows how long, followed by being accused of murdering four men. Through that whole ordeal I did not once request to contact my lawyer." Miranda leaned back in her chair and crossed one leg over the other. "Now I am almost tempted to make such as request." Though Jack did not make a move, did not react to the sudden flaw that was blaringly present in the room and the heavy threat that sat on the table. Hannibal did notice how Jack took it all in and he could see the man thinking Miranda's observation and her cold threat over in his mind.

"Alright Miss. Rhettford, what is you condition?"

Miranda leaned forward in her seat. "I want to talk with Will. Please I need to see him. Then I will be more than willing to comply, just let me talk with him." Miranda replied her voice the perfect sound of a pleading woman in need of comfort, it made Hannibal wish he had lost his hearing, so he wouldn't have had to listen to such a false song.

"Alright, that can be done." Jack replied as he stood and Miranda looked up with pleading wishful eyes.

"Thank you, Agent Crawford. I am so glad we could work something out." Miranda solemnly smiled and watched as he walked off. Hannibal felt the lukewarm feeling of disappointment travel over his nerves as he watched as Jack easily complied to such a ridiculous demand. Whatever form of respect he might have felt for the man had shrunken even more; if that was even possible. As soon as the door closed, did Miranda's features take a drastic shift, no longer did she hold some form of doe eyes and a soft smile. Instead it was all replaced with a sober expression as Miranda turned her attention towards the one-way mirror, her eyes cold and empty and no trace of any expression was held on her face. She was simply a blank slate as she stared at her own reflection, as though she was having a telepathic conversation with it.

What possible thoughts might be running through that maze of a mind of yours? Hannibal wondered as he studied the blank expression, searching for any sign of an emotion that might be forming within her. *Are you swimming in the wading waters of fear as a distinctly fatal charge is slowly being pressed on top of you. Can you feel the pressure Rhettford, do you feel the walls slowly close in on you, surrounding you with each tumultuous tick of the clock. Is your heart racing or is it slowly beating, making the blood in your veins pump like wet cement. Putting you in a state close to hibernation while you wait and see if the noose around your neck will either snap or loosen.*

The door to the interrogation room opened and it brought Miranda out of her hypnotic state as she blinked a few times and turned her attention towards the door. Where her face once again lit up, switching in an instant as she noticed who had entered the room this time. Hannibal watched as Will slowly entered, no longer was the profiler fighting back his prickly demeanor from earlier, where it seemed like any move might have him ready to snap. Instead the man who walked in was far softer and less explosive as a cloak of care for the woman draped over him. Miranda stood up from her spot and briskly walked over to Will. Who didn't hesitate to practically scoop her in his arms, Will wrapped his arms around her in a protective manner as he held the back of her head, while Miranda buried her face in his shoulder. Will's other hand ran soothing circles around her back. The supposably heartwarming sight made Hannibal's stomach twist and had that cracking substance in him tighten its hold.

"Oh Will, what is happening?" Miranda was the first of the two to speak as she pulled her head back to look at the profiler with pleading eyes that shimmered with unshed tear that were caused by worry.

Yes, Will what is happening, because to me it seems as though Rhettford, is beginning her performance of the stereotypical damsel in distress. That means that you are to play the knight in shining armor, a part you are always desperate to perform. Yet not the proper role for you to sadly fill, it is almost lucky that you have such an unrestrained imagination. Only then could you fool yourself with that pure role.

"Agent Crawford believes me to be this Black Widow woman and the only thing that's stopping him from throwing me in a dark cell is a piece of hair." Miranda continued with the

right amount of panic in her tone, that Hannibal knew Will's empathy was soaking in without even realizing it as it also fed off the facial display, she was giving it.

Will let out a breath and his eyes began to wonder around the room. "It does seem like this hair is keeping the wolves at bay." Will spoke. "Along with the new theory that it might be Brittney who is the Black Widow. That only seems to tighten the leash around their throats." Miranda pulled herself out of Will's hold and began to walk back to the table, with her arms wrapped tightly around herself, the perfect pose for coming off as distraught.

"I can't believe this is all happening." Miranda shook her head, running her hand through her hair in discomfort before she turned to look at Will. "Do you believe that Brittney might actually be the Black Widow. That all this was because she's," a grimace formed on Miranda's face, "obsessed with me."

Yes, Will do you, though I only had a singular phone call with the little gnat of a woman. I hardly believe her to be this predatory arachnid. You on the other hand had more than one interaction with her, seen this possible obsessive behavior in action could this actually be something so drastic. Or perhaps Miranda is just pointing the accusing fingers away from her and towards a weaker prey. Now doesn't that sound as something that a meticulous web weaver would do.

Will let out a huff of air and scratched the back of his head as he tried to come up with a proper answer to give Miranda. Hannibal could see the two sides of Will's thoughts battling against each other, fighting for room in the spot light. How he wished to see those golden cogs turning, in a speed that was bound to have the teeth of those cogs catching now and again, until the misstep could not be tolerated anymore and have everything catch fire. As it all comes undone for the profiler. It would be a beautiful display of chaos unwinding.

"You have known her longer Miranda, does Brittney seem like the type of person to actually be capable of murder." Will breathed out as he looked over to her, searching for some give in Miranda's reaction that might answer the question for her.

Oh, redirection what a proper ploy to play my boy. Point the attention away from yourself and towards Miranda, giving you more time to actually come up with a suitable answer or try to leave it behind.

Miranda let out a sigh and began to look around the room. "If you would have asked me that a few months ago, my answer would be no. But now after all these questions, retelling of profiles and small coincidence that are laid out. I honestly don't know. Because on one hand I don't see it, but when you think about, you yourself along with Lecter had pointed out how her obsessive tendency could take a drastic turn." She fully faced Will. "What if it already had and none of us were able to see it."

Will walked over to Miranda and placed a hand on her shoulder, the simple gesture turned into another hug. As Miranda pressed herself into him and Will slowly wrapped his arms around her, placing his head on top of hers as she once again buried her face into his shoulder. Another sight the oozed comfort like an infected wound, that had Hannibal turning his gaze. No longer able to stand such a pathetic show of affection, that was somewhat worse than when the two had their moment of reuniting a few days ago.

“It’ll be alright.” Will murmured as he ran a hand through Miranda’s hair and stopped at her back. Nuzzling his cheek against the top of her head as he continued to hold her tight. It seemed as though he was trying to prove to Miranda that he was someone she could lean on while the world around them threatened to crumble.

“It sure as hell doesn’t feel like it.” Miranda replied, her voice sounded hollow and weary. As her grip on him tightened and she put all her weight against him

“I know, trust me I know.” Will replied, his voice soft and gentle as he continued to sooth the woman. Hannibal watched as Miranda shifted her stance and slowly began to turn her head away from the safety of Will’s neck. So she was facing the mirror again and for a split-second Hannibal wondered if she actually knew that he was watching them the whole time.

Will exited the interrogation room, feeling as though every ounce of his mental and physical energy had been drained out of him. And he did not foresee it every being able to refill anytime soon, not as long as Miranda was being questioned and he was forced to sit on the side line. The only reason he was able to actually have a moment with her was because she asked Jack, used him as a bargaining chip. Though Will knew he should feel somewhat offended to be seen as something to use in order to gain a step forward in the investigation. He was so used to such a treatment, it no longer stung when it happened to him so blatantly. At one point it had, when he was first starting out and word spread of his “gift” it had stung. To be seen only as a tool to use to jump into other’s heads, only to be referred to as that officer with the ability to place himself in the mind of criminals and nothing else. While he had pushed himself to be a well-known detective than hopefully FBI agent. He discovered he could never separate himself from the unwanted association. Like most things though, over time Will had grown accustom to the sting and he grew a callus where the needle would prick him, a sign that he had gotten over it. It was another thing to roll off his back, for him to ignore and move forward without paying it any mind.

“Will.” The profiler turned towards the voice, completely caught off guard by the sound of his own name being spoken.

“Oh, Doctor Lecter,” Will said, trying not to pay attention on how flat his voice sounded, “I thought you’d be with Jack.” He added after a few heavy blinks while he tried to gather his thoughts and conjure up enough energy to have a coherent conversation with the doctor. Hannibal slowly began to walk over to Will. He quickly caught how Will abandoned the idea of using his first name, once again showing the doctor that he had put his walls back up for Hannibal to dissect away around.

“Though Crawford had asked me to observe only a small portion of the interrogation with Miss. Rhettford,” Hannibal directed his attention over to the room and Will followed his eyes, before the two returned their attention back to one another. Will felt himself begin to prickle at the thought of Jack having Lecter view what small amount of back and forth the head agent had with Miranda. The idea of Lecter trying to pick apart Miranda’s mind, behind one-way glass to see if she was as crazy as the rest of the criminals that they hunted. It had the hairs on the back of his neck rising all over again and that protective instinct rearing its head once more. “The reason I came down here was because Jack was concerned over you and how you might be handling this whole ordeal with the possibility that Miss. Rhettford

might be this Black Widow." A doubled edge sword Hannibal intentionally thrusted into Will, reassurance that he was not there to profile Miranda, but instead to check on Will's mental health. But also bringing up what had been obviously plaguing him. Now with the blade lodged in Will's chest, Hannibal had to decipher if he wanted to twist the blade, or simply pull it out. Either way there would no doubt be damage and that was something he wanted to inflict on the profiler.

"Oh really, did he see cracks start to form on his favorite tea cup and quickly called you. To make sure I could still hold liquid without leaking." Will said through gritted teeth, he had told Jack not to call in Lecter, that he could handle the sharp shift in the case. But it was obvious the man didn't believe him and that stung worse than being treated like a bargaining chip. It felt like being stung by a wasp and the stinger was left behind to infect the wound. To pester at him, until someone most likely himself pulled the stinger out and treated the infection with his own home remedy. That being going home pouring himself some whiskey; after today it was most likely going to be the bottle Miranda gifted him. He felt like he could use something beyond decent to help sooth his wound-up nerves and sitting in the quiet dark of his home where he would just listen to the sounds of the forest that surrounded his little farm house and the natural being of his dogs. That always seemed to cure whatever damage that the job inflicted onto him.

Watch yourself Mongoose, I allowed you to bite me once already with your words. Only because I had set you in motion. Now though there is certainly no need for the out lash. I'd advise you not to make a habit of it or I might have to take drastic actions on reminding you who you are truly talking to.

"Now Will, you know Crawford was only looking out for your wellbeing, that's why he wanted you to take a step back when it comes to continuing this case and why he called me in to check in on you." Will let out a heavy breath through his nose and began to rub the back of his neck, wondering at what point during all this did his muscles begin to feel so stiff. It must have happened as soon as Jack opened his mouth that morning. "Perhaps we should discuss this somewhere else," Hannibal continued as he took a few steps closer to Will. Arm stretched out, to guide Will into following his lead while still lost in his mind. "Preferably some place where you can sit, you look as though your body is on the verge of crumbling." Will did not put up that much of a fight as Hannibal began to guide him away from the interrogation room. His mind was starting to fog again, as the two sides began to emerge from the rumble of their previous battle. This made it easy for Hannibal to lead Will away from Miranda and towards a location where it would just be them, where he would take hold of the conversation and perhaps help Will figure out what side of his mind he should side with.

"Though I do not find myself that fond of the coffee that is provided here, I feel as though you might need the small dosage of caffeine." Hannibal said as he set down the cup in front of Will, who looked as though he was drowning in his own head. Eyes hollow as they stared off deeply into the table and a weary expression painted his face, Hannibal almost expected Will to jump slightly when the cup was set in front of him. But instead he watched as slow fingers untangled themselves and reached out to grasp the cup, pulling it towards his slightly turned down head. Where he turned those deep eyes onto the coffee.

“Thanks.” Was all he mumbled as he looked down at his reflection. The last time he had a cup of coffee in the break room with a friend was when he was contemplating about if he should keep the watch Miranda had gifted him. If he closed his eyes, he could still picture the way she lit up when she noticed him wearing it around her for the first time. The way she held his wrist, so she could get a better look at it and the constant stream of affection and joy that she released. How he wished he could go back to then, where the Black Widow was a vengeful ex and all he had to do was try to convince Miranda not to continue the need to spend so much money on him. Now he had to figure out whether or not she was the Black Widow. Will didn’t even realize he had been absent mindlessly running his finger over the watch, feeling the bumps of the titanium band and the smooth surface of the glass face. Until he caught Hannibal in the reflection of the shining metal, bringing him half way out of his mind.

“So, what now. Is this the part where you try to convince me that I should sit back and let everything play out. Let Jack do his job and not try to fight him tooth and nail over the fact that he basically removed me from the case now that Miranda’s involved.” Will huffed barely looking up to see Hannibal’s response, looking the man head on for only a split second, before his eyes dropped to settle to look at the Windsor knot of his dark green paisley necktie. Hannibal slightly tilted his head to the side as his eyes micro searched Will’s features. He could see that there was still some fight in Will, he wasn’t completely ready to give not yet. But he was slowly coming to that conclusion and that gave Hannibal ample opportunity to twist Will.

“Though that is what Crawford expects me to do,” Hannibal licked his lips as he slightly shifted where he sat next to Will. Adjusting his arms so they rested on the table, elbows slightly bent so they lightly brushed against Will’s. Will turned his eyes towards where he felt Hannibal’s elbow brush his arm, if he was perhaps in a more energized state he might have reacted to the brush by shifting himself. But he was still feeling the heavy weight of exhaustion that he didn’t even bother to move. Instead he raised his gaze so he was no longer looking at Hannibal’s tie, but at the man’s lips instead. “We both know I take that expectation he has with a grain of salt.” He replied with a small stretch of his lips that could be consider a smile, but if a stranger were to look, they would not even notice it. But Will noticed it and he found himself mirroring the expression in his own way.

“Yeah, you’re right.” Will replied as he took a sip of the coffee not all surprised by the hot stale bitter taste that greeted him. Only reason it was actually palpable was because Hannibal put some cream and sugar into it. If he hadn’t Will wondered if he actually be able to sip at the coffee in the first place. He let out a huff through his nose and Hannibal watched as Will’s shoulders sagged as his muscles finally gave from the stress he was under. “I just don’t know what to think. Don’t know what do.” Will chewed at the inside of his cheek and shook his head. “My mind is a bustling mess of different opinions. It's a battle zone and whatever side comes out victorious I feel as though I will still end up coming out with the most damage.”

“And why is that?” Hannibal pushed, though he knew the answer he wanted to hear Will say it out loud, hear him reveal his true thoughts on the whole ordeal.

“Because my mind and heart are at war with each other and the sickening ordeal is that I don’t exactly know what side I should be on. Which one I want to come out on top. I’ve

never dealt with this problem before," Will shook his head slightly and took another sip of coffee, "never felt this way before either. It's all new to me. I want justice for these victims even if they don't truly deserve it, but at the same time I want to protect Miranda. The facts are speaking in a volume too loud to ignore, yet so is the heavy list of other possibilities."

"Yes, that is something we often face the battle of heart and mind. Where logic and emotions often fight and someone who deals with pure empathy like yourself where you are not only subjugated to your own emotions, but others as well. I am not all that surprise to hear that you are struggling."

"Great another reason how my mind has found a way to screw me over." Will grumbled under his breath as he loosely rolled his eyes and took another sip of coffee. Instead of actually wanting to drink the liquid to help increase his energy. He was using it to fill the empty void where neither one of them talked. To distract his mind and mouth, so he wouldn't have to come up with something else to say.

"Tell me Will," Hannibal began "do you truly believe that Miranda might actually be this Black Widow that you've been hunting?" He asked as he closed his hands together and waited for the other's response. Though with heavy conversation topics such as the one they were having often involved the two taking in metaphors and scenarios that touched the topic without actually voicing it out loud. This time Hannibal knew he had to be assertive, grab hold of the other and force what Will really thought of the whole ordeal out of him. It would catch him off guard, not give him time to come up with a well-crafted response that might hide his true answer. The answer that would most likely be buried deep in Will's subconscious, where it was left to rot and wither away until it no longer existed, where it could no longer harm him.

Will's eyes shot up to look at Hannibal head on and Hannibal witness a quick shimmer of rage travel through those tantalizing eyes, before they disappeared. To focus on some other part of his face that would give the illusion of eye contact. "What do you believe Doctor Lecter?" Will asked his voice hollow and it rode on the air with its light weight. As his eyes still did not reinitiate eye contact, but they did look as though they were fighting the want to. Hannibal wasn't all that surprised to hear the question emerge from Will as a response, he almost expected it to happen. It was a fifty-fifty chance for Will to actually answer the question instead of avoiding it. Turing it back on to Hannibal, to shift the attention away from him and towards the other, so he could go another round of prodding without facing what was really nestled in his mind.

Now with the question pointed towards himself, it had Hannibal contemplating his own view on the situation. Where he found himself also feeling a similar hard split that had been plaguing Will. It would be most corruptingly delightful if Miranda had turned out to be this Black Widow that Will had been chasing. Only because it would end with Miranda being sealed away in the darkest part of the federal prison. Locked in a steel cage, stuck amongst the rest of the murders who were foolish enough to get caught. Where she would stay trapped and forgotten until the cool hand of death reached out for her. While Will tried to recover from such a horrendous blow, that would most certainly leave him broken and lost. There would be a large gaping wound in his chest, where his heart was brutally ripped out of him,

along with the tear in his psyche he would suffer from. As he was left to wonder amongst those who were still whole. It all would be a macabre beauty to witness and savor.

Yet if Miranda did indeed turn out to be this Black Widow, that would mean that he wasn't as aware of her as Hannibal initially thought he was. It ment that through the whole ordeal with interacting with the woman, not once did he manage to pick up on any sign of her actually having such a similar double life as his own. It meant he was so caught up with the blistering boiling emotion of jealousy and the mind stretching game that he found himself taking part in. He ended up blinding himself, while Miranda played with all her senses. That would be a more dreadful blow to take, it left little of an idea if he could survive it. Could he be able to look himself in the mirror at the end of the day and be happy with who he saw looking back at him. A man who often considered himself above all, a wolf easily let into the sheep pen and left unsupervised. Now facing the idea that he was not the only wolf let into the pen, there was another already with her teeth sinking into the flesh of the lamb that he had already claimed long before she had arrived.

That was something to consider. So in reality did Hannibal actually believe Miranda to be the Black Widow? Did he want her to be or did he not want her to be. It seemed like the double edge sword that he had digging into his palms since last night, that he was able to take and stab the blade into Will was once returned to him to suffer with.

"It doesn't matter though in the end," Will breathed out as he lowered his cup and stared at it instead of looking at Hannibal, "Jack isn't going to listen to either of us. We took too longer when it came to supplying him with an answer he can accept and so he is going to turn to the evidence to help guide his way through the dark fog." Will finished. Hannibal realized as soon as the last of Will's sentence left his mouth, he had missed his opportunity. Caught in his own mind trying to sew together the split, Will had closed himself off. No longer waiting for a response and ready to move on to the next topic, the chance to maneuver Will's thinking, have him turn on Miranda when it came to deciding which organ to listen to had slipped through his fingers. All because he could not come to his own conclusion. Though Will had reversed the question on to him, there was the opportunity unknowingly given to the doctor. In some hidden way Will was looking towards Hannibal for guidance even if it was subconsciously. Now it was gone, Will had raised his barriers once more and it seemed like the barrier had a few more feet added to it, making it that much more challenging to get over.

"I'm disappointed to hear that you feel that way about all this," Hannibal replied, "I would very much like to continue this discussion and see if I can assist you when it comes to dealing with this troublesome split that you are feeling." Hannibal tried to reengage Will into their previous discussion, but Will simply shook his head.

"Sorry Doctor Lecter. I feel like this is something I need to figure out on my own." Will replied, cutting off any idea of a reattempt from the other. Showing that he had no intention of letting Hannibal disengage his barriers and that he was going to stay behind the walls, where he could be alone with his thoughts. Even though Hannibal knew he could continue to push until Will's barriers broke, giving him just enough space so he could slip past, he also knew it might have the opposite effect. Like when he had asked that heavy question and how Will had responded it told Hannibal that he was going to push back instead of allowing Hannibal the pleasure of seeing him submit to the question. Will was going to protect himself

as he wondered through the battle that took place inside of him and long after the smoke cleared.

A low muffled buzz caught both men's attention and Hannibal watched Will pull out his phone from his pant's pocket. He witnessed as Will's once sober face twisted into one of confusion, his eyebrows knitted as he stared down at the screen. His head tilted slightly while he figured out whatever message that was sent to him.

"What is it Will?" Hannibal asked. Will blinked a few times as though he had forgotten he wasn't entirely alone when it came to reading the text. That had obviously sent him back into the endless labyrinth of his mind.

"It's Beverly, she's letting me know that they are bringing in Brittney for more questioning," Will replied not looking up from the screen as he scrolled down the text to take in more of the information. "That they found some evidence in her apartment that might be pointing her towards being the Black Widow."

What A Wicked Web We Weave

Chapter Summary

It's Brittney's turn to have all eyes on her and it is also time to get some clear answers out of this already muddled case. Will the identity of the Black Widow finally be uncovered by the team, or will they find themselves caught in her web?

Chapter Notes

Just a heads up I know that a DNA comparison takes more than one day to process, but hey that's fanfiction for ya. Enjoy the chapter :)

Hannibal followed close behind Will, as the special agent made his way towards Jack's office. Will did not say anything after he summarized the text to the doctor, he just simply stood up and briskly walked out of the breakroom, it seemed that was enough to give him the energy he actually thought that might be lost to him. Leaving behind his half-finished coffee to sit on the table abandoned and made his way over to the head agent's office with Hannibal trailing behind him. Watching as Will, made his way down the hall with a purpose in his step, Hannibal couldn't help, but wonder what might be buzzing around the other's vast mind and what might follow after they reached their destination. Though Hannibal liked to be in the loop when it came to Will's thinking, in fact he mostly insisted that he was in some form or another. Rather it be simply asking blatantly; though that was rare of him to actually do, to cracking Will's mind open with subtle word play that acted like a chisel and hammer. Either option often let the man inside some parts of Will's mind that the other often had walls surrounding and after their little game of circling, those walls were going to stay up high as long as Will sought fit while they walked down the hallway. So, Hannibal for once did not push Will to open himself up, he just simply let whatever events might happen, play out in front of him. It might actually make this little show that much more enjoyable.

Will didn't even knock on the agent's door; he simply pushed it open with a small amount of haste in that push and with that same amount of quickness, walked into the room. Hannibal had to catch the door so it wouldn't close to roughly when they passed through. Showing Jack which one of them would be the more level headed one when it came to the future conversation that Hannibal still had no real idea of what it might be.

"Gentlemen, please come in." Jack said; the sarcasm wasn't lost in his tone, but it was well hidden as he peered up from his desk and he watched as Will walked over to him, while Hannibal stood a few feet back. Closer towards the door that he just softly closed. Expressing

that he was not going to be a part of the conversation that was about to be born between the two, that he was simply a bystander there to witness it all take shape.

“I just heard that you’re bringing Brittney in for questioning.” Will said as he looked over at Jack with questioning eyes. Jack leaned back in his chair and nodded his head at the statement. “That some evidence was found that might be pointing her towards being our killer.”

“Yes, Katz and Zeller are bringing her in as we speak.” Jack responded as he watched with scrutinizing eyes to see Will’s reaction. To try and predict what the profiler might say or do next. After he intentionally avoided the last part of Will’s statement.

Will let out a sigh, annoyed at Jack once again trying to side step his statements and unspoken questions. He had almost forgotten how hard it could be talking to the other man. Will would say it was like talking to a brick wall on some days, but at least with a brick wall you could get everything off of your chest and not have any forms of repercussions afterwards. “What exactly did they find?” Will asked as he tried to keep the sharpness mixed with frustration out of his voice.

“They found just the right amount of evidence that might indicate her into being our Black Widow, now that should be enough.” Will let out another huff of frustrated air, he was not mentally strong enough to deal with this back and forth, he felt like he was running on fumes at this point of the day. Will slowly began to pace in short strides in front of Jack’s desk as he tried to come up with a way to voice the thoughts that piled in a large mound on his tongue, but refused to be sifted through. Only growing and becoming a mess of different words and emotions. All while he felt his mind slowly begin to buzz once more with a pent-up energy that he thought had passed him a long time ago. “Besides you should feel relieved Will,” Jack slowly leaned forward hands clasped. “This could mean that Miranda is almost off the hook.”

Will stopped his short-lived pace before he turned to Jack. “Trust me Jack the relief is there.” He said with slightly narrowed eyes. It was true the idea that Miranda might actually be freed from all this mess felt like a weight was being lifted off of his chest, but it didn’t mean he could actually walk down to the room that Miranda still sat in, while she waited for the test results and tell her what was happening. To see the promise of relief wash over her, something to him that she desperately needed at the moment. Instead of being left alone in a cold room, being treated like a criminal even though no charges were pressed on her, just speculations. Being left in the same inky darkness that he felt slowly consuming his own vision.

Will was only allowed that one extremely short visit and he still felt that prominent need to stand in front of her, to protect her from what else might be thrown at her. He had thought that the visit might dull down that feeling in some slightest way, but to no one’s surprise it only fed the feeling. There was also that battle that had slowly died down in his mind, it seemed like the text had brought some form of cover that he could sit behind and gather himself. Until the war came to a conclusion that he still wasn’t quite sure what side he wanted to come out as the victor or not.

Will’s mind felt like it was covered in rubble and smoke, as he tried to make his way through the remanence of the battle field. No sign of the victor lay among the carnage for him to

accept, it was as though the two sides had taken themselves out, in the process of trying to come out as the dominate reaction. The two feelings were too equally matched against one another to actually be able to have one of those sides come out on top. It left Will feeling semi hollow, the idea of never actually having an outcome to face and accept if neither side actually won. It had finally brought him the quiet he was seeking throughout the whole day, but it felt jarringly wrong to not have the conclusion he actually wanted. Perhaps it was because he wasn't given a solid resolution to focus on, he did not have any new information to grab onto. He was just given words that described the actions that were taking place around him and not the reasons why it was happening in the first place. He was basically told to accept it for what it was and be happy for the outcome that might follow, but the problem with that was Will wasn't someone who could take things at face value even though that was a prospect that he often wished he had. Will needed reasons and right now he had none.

"But so is the cold feeling of being left in the dark." Will said as he fully turned to Jack and pinched the bridge of his nose and let out a slow breath. "I know you said you wanted me to step back and I did. I even left the interrogation room when an agent came into swab Miranda," Will lowered his arms and placed his hands on his hips, "but I do not expect to be fully blinded for the rest of this case. Not when we are approaching the finish line."

It must be so infuriating being the dark Will, having it surround you in its endless woeful landscape. While you are so accustom to having every singular angle there is blaring so brightly into your eyes. Now all you have is a vast amount of nothingness, with already used information at your disposal and an idea of that said light you are used to always owning a mere hand grip a way. It must make you feel so powerless, dare I say hopeless. Hannibal thought as he waited for Jack to respond, the air in the room shifted and everything was quiet for a few moments. If Hannibal focused, he might be able to catch Will's heartbeat; fast and heavy as frustration slowly built up inside his chest. Creating a mangled cluttered space, hard for the organ to function properly as it tried to do its job of pumping blood and giving life. He casted his eyes over towards Jack; who simply looked on at Will; who was waiting for a response. Jack slowly studied Will for a few moments, before he let out a heavy breath.

"You're right." Jack simply said as he got up from his desk. "This case seems to be nearing its end and you do deserve to see it through to it." Will and Hannibal both straightened themselves in perfect unison as though there was an invisible string connected their muscles together, if one move so did the other. Will opened his mouth to say something along the lines of being glad that the man could see it his way, but before he could Jack held up his hand to stop whatever sentence might come from his mouth. "But just because I am giving you this, doesn't necessarily mean you are fully back in," Jack continued as he crossed his arms. An obvious power stance, a reminder to Will of who was actually in charge of the investigation. "You are still on the side lines Will, you're just more in the loop."

"Alright," Will replied, he knew he had to try and play a little nice, if he wanted to stay in the small loop that Jack was letting him stand in. "Does this mean you are going to give me the benefit of at least sitting in on the interrogation." Will offered as he lowered his hands from his hips, to come off as more pliant paired with a similar look that Miranda had given Jack that very morning that read 'will you at least give me that.' Jack stared at Will for a few heavy beats of a second, before his eyes shifted away from him and over his shoulder. Will drew his shoulders back as he straightened himself out, his slightly narrowed eyes widened in

a close look of bewilderment that morphed into disbelief. Will did not need to turn to look over his own shoulder to know who Jack was looking at, confirming with.

So this is how the rest of this case will play out I see. Will thought with irritation dripping into his thoughts and reheating that faintly diminishing anger that for a while felt like slow glowing coals. That were turning white as the heat that was nestled inside them died out, now those coals were being cracked open to reveal the glowing center that still held some heat. That would grow once more when oxygen reached its sensitive center. Will felt a bitter chuckle crawl up his throat and scratch at his clenched teeth, begging to be let out. Begging to be freed from its cell and show those in the room his actually true emotions. *You're going to turn to Lecter when it comes to handling me. If I would have known that the loop you were letting my step in was an actual collar and leash that you were going to hand over to Lecter, I would have kept my mouth shut.* Will fought off the cringe that was born with that thought. It twisted at his stomach and had his chest feeling tight, made a wave of agitation pull at his muscles and scrape at his vocal cords. Wanting him to use his actually words in this situation instead of just standing there, while two men had a telepathic conversation regarding him.

Jack turned his attention back to Will, as if whatever silent conversation he had with Hannibal was over and he let out a deep breath. "You've met Miss. Wilts before, so you know how she is, I'm also assuming you have your own profile on her." Will knew where this sentence was going and he tried not to let out a sigh and fall into the habit of rolling his eyes.

"Brittney as I told Beverly earlier, can be described as having a submissive personality. She's eager to please those who hold a higher rank and possibly those who have more confidents. She's soft spoken and shy. Very mouse like compared to others, this was probably caused by growing up in perhaps a hostile home environment or a hostile environment altogether. Where she learned if she kept quiet and tried to come off as small, she was most likely going to avoid getting harmed." Will took in a deep breath, feeling his lungs stretch and his chest expand. As he watched as Jack once more tapped his index finger to his chin.

"Now that doesn't sound like the Black Widow to me." Jack commented, but before Will could reply, the man continued. "But then again it all could have been an act this whole time. A way to slide under the radar, until she found the right man to attack."

It wasn't an outlandish theory; the whole time Will had interacted with Brittney, could have been a mask she had worn. A way for her to blend into the crowded world she worked in, only emerging when needed and stayed hidden when not. Driving the idea of her submissive personality home with the delicate jumpy act. Paired with the obsessive behavior that Will knew for certain wasn't an act, that part of her felt all too real to be seen as a mask she worn. But then so did the submissive behavior, that also felt real to him at the time. Yet if that behavior was real then why did she give the warning about Miranda, if she wanted to stay on her boss' good side, that was definitely something she shouldn't have done. It was risk to take, there was the possibility that he would turn to Miranda with the information and it would end up putting her in the bullpen wearing all red. Which had happened, so perhaps Brittney's submissive behavior, just like Miranda's flirtatious act towards male clients, was all an act that she wanted to be taken at face value.

Will let out a breath through his nose and slid his hands into his pockets. “I mean that could be a possibility.” Once again agreeing to the theory had left an oily residue on his tongue and had him rethinking his words. It had him rethinking a lot of ideas and possibilities, he felt his mind slowly begin to fill and become crowded again. How he wished there was some invisible valve on the side of his head he could twist and have those jumbling thoughts that flooded his mind come pouring out. The relief he would feel from something so simple would be a gift from a God at that moment.

“Glad to know you are finally on the same page as I am Will.” Jack commented and Will felt another flare of aggression lick at his spine, causing him to grit his teeth.

“So, does this mean I can watch the interrogation?” If the theory of Brittney being the Black Widow left an oily residue on his tongue, asking this question felt sour, made his throat clench and his facial muscles twitch. Wanting to cringe at the request that made him feel like an adolescent child asking for permission to go outside and play with his friends. Once again Will watched as Jack’s eyes drifted over his shoulder to Lecter and Will’s jaw tightened. *What’s wrong Jack did you actually see cracks form and now you want to make sure you are using delectate hands to handle me. Can’t you make one decision without going to Lecter. Maybe I should just step out of the room, so you two can actually have a verbal conversation.*

A knock came from behind the door, Will turned for the first time to look over his shoulder to see who might be breaking the telepathic conversation that was blatantly about him. The three men watched as Zeller leaned in through the door by the look on his face; eyes slightly more opened and the clear want to have his jaw almost ajar. The investigator wasn’t expecting to see two other people inside his boss’ office. He looked between all three of them, before he decided to speak.

“Just giving you a heads up, we have Miss. Wilts sitting in interrogation room two. Waiting to be questioned and all that.” Zeller informed casting a look over and Will then at Hannibal. Before subtly shaking his head with a more bewildered look playing at his face. It was obvious he wanted to know what was going on between the three, wondering what he had just interrupted. But at the same time he wasn’t all that surprised to see it in the first place. The three watched as Zeller closed the door and began to walk down the hall, Jack watched until the investigator was no longer insight before turning back to Will. Jack slowly crossed his arms, this time it wasn’t a power stance or any stance of the matter. It was a simple go to way of standing for the man.

“Looks like we’ll be heading over to interrogation room two.” Jack said as he began to walk around the desk and towards the door.

“Wait.” Will spoke, arm slightly out stretched, as if there was a trail behind the head agent and he was reaching out to grab of hold of it. Jack stopped at the door and slowly turned to face Will, Hannibal’s eyes traveled from Jack and over towards Will as well. Curiosity woven into his face, meticulously placed to give it away without coming off as needing to subdue the feeling.

“What is it Will?” Jack asked as he lowered his own hand from reaching for the door handle. Will turned to face the two, his movement slow, as he rethought his next sentence that was about to come from his mouth.

“I don’t think it be the best idea if you conduct the interrogation.” Will answered quickly and it felt like a pound of air had just left his lungs. Jack raised on of his eyebrows and Will quickly pulled his thoughts back together to continue to answer the question that hadn’t left Jack’s mouth. “It’s just if we keep in mind that Brittney’s submissive behaver is genuine it be best if we pair her with someone less brazen.” Will continued as he focused his eyes over Jack’s shoulder and towards the door.

“And why would that be an ideal choice Will?” Hannibal asked, talking for the first time since he had entered the office after Will. It almost took Will by surprised to hear the man actually talk and not try to have another silent conversation with Jack. Will’s eyes adjusted themselves to look over at Hannibal and for a micro second, he was certain that he saw a fleeting glimpse of a smirk form on the man’s face. It almost made him hesitant to answer the question, as he felt the strong urge to ask Hannibal to explain it himself since he is the actual licensed psychiatrist. But Will had to remind himself to play nice, or else that loop that hung around his neck might tighten at any moment, with a small flick of the doctor’s wrist and he knew not even deep down that Lecter wouldn’t hesitate to pull tight on the leash that Jack had given him. To watch Will drop to his knees as his airway was slowly being cut off, his hands latching round the collar as he pulled backwards. Fighting for an ounce of the air that surrounded him, taunted him. All while Hannibal stood back and watched with dark greedy eyes, pleased by the obvious reaction.

“Because there are two possibilities that could play out,” Will’s eyes returned to look over Jack’s shoulder, “Brittney would either shut down, retreating into her mind looking for cover that obviously isn’t there. Or she might break down and agree to anything you throw at her, believing that would be the only way to escape the situation.”

“So you’re implying that we go easy one her, do I need to remind you that we are dealing with a possible murderer.” Jack replied with an edge of frustrated disbelief in his tone.

“I’m not saying go easy on her Jack, I’m saying unlike Miranda who can handle your aggression and is able build a barrier to counteract it. Brittney won’t have any means like that, so she’ll need a different approach. Unless you want a confession built on nothing usable in court or be talking at a statue for the duration of the time. I suggest send in someone else.” Will replied, noticing the low level of frustration hidden in his own tone. Wondering once more why it was so hard for someone to understand his thinking even when it was laid bare for others to see.

“Alright, I understand where you are coming from. I’ll have Katz handle the integration unless you have someone else in mind.” Will stood there for a moment, as he processed the sentence turned rhetorical question, realizing Jack was no longer looking for Will’s input. Instead of giving Jack a verbal response he lightly nodded his head. Showing that he understood what Jack told him. “Good.” Was the other’s reply before Jack left the room to go retrieve Beverly and get her prepared for the interrogation.

When the door closed behind him, Will turned his attention over to Hannibal. Who still stood perfectly still by the door. Unlike Will or Jack, the man never left his initial spot. Pleased to stand at the side lines and watch the two. Only bringing his presence into light when noticed then duck back into the dark of the background. Where he would remain unnoticed,

undisturbed, left to his own devices. Picking apart the act in front of him and savoring the parts that truly caught his eyes and fed his attention. Hannibal already had his attention turned onto Will, before the profiler could initiate any form of interaction they might have now that they were alone once again. It had him wondering which one would break the chest crushing silence that filled the room like flooding water. Would Hannibal utter another one-off sentence, questioning Will's winding trail of thought. Or would Will be the one to break the silence because it was becoming unbearably uncomfortable. No longer able to stand the rising silence that crushed his chest cavity and clawed at his thoughts, giving his mind too much to focused on while little was actually happening around the two.

In an attempt to show Hannibal that he wasn't the one to break first. Will made a show of setting his jaw in place. Sometimes it helped to be obvious in his actions, like a rattlesnake rattling the tip of its tail to passerby. It might bring more attention to the deadly snake, but it also set off a warning on what lies in the future when the snake was crossed. Him setting his jaw in place was his warning to the doctor, that if Hannibal waited for Will to actually speak first there might be nothing but venom awaiting him. Hannibal seen the warning and instead of challenging it, like he mostly did. Drilling into Will with an expert hand until the man cried uncle and broke, Will was given the rare form of leniency that was often hidden away.

"Jack believes this Miss. Wilts might be our Black Widow and you never quiet answered my previous question on what your thoughts might be on all this." Hannibal spoke his voice matching his demeaner in a calm tone. While he walked away from the wall with his hands clasped in front of him.

"And your point being?" Will asked as he watched with skeptical eyes as Hannibal grew close and he felt something begin to tighten around him. Will felt his body responding to the yet to be spoken question. Preparing itself for the blow from the heavy question and trying to reduce any damage that it might have on him. He was already wounded from the question the first time he heard it that morning causing cracks to form in him. As he threated to chip apart slowly and be left alone to pick up those fallen pieces. He had some of those pieces back in their rightful places, thanks to the long list of doubts he managed to conjure up and the ability to reconnect with Miranda and comfort her. But he still wasn't ready for another blow.

"My point as you elegantly put it," Hannibal breathed out, unamused with Will's more guarded behaver, "is that, what do you believe Will. Do believe that Miss Wilts is the Black Widow or do you believe it is to be Miss. Rhettford?" Though Will had prepared himself for the blow of the stone made question. He still felt the harsh damage that it caused him. He could see those pieces that were placed back, begin to fall to the ground and shatter on impact making sure that they couldn't be picked up and put back.

Will took in a deep breath and tried to clear his mind of the debris that was left from the inner battle. While he came up with an answer, he was uncertain that he could actually give in the first place. "I believe I feel uncertain on the matter as a whole, Doctor Lecter." Will replied with heavy honesty as he felt his fingers gently tap against his thigh, a nervous habit like when he would lick his lips. A habit he could never fully break and a tale that any eye, trained or not could catch him doing. Instead of waiting for a response, Will walked past Hannibal, shoulder's slight hunched as he made his way out of the room and over to interrogation room two; if the leash allowed it.

Unlike Miranda, who when left in her own interrogation room waiting. Barely moved, just light adjustment and soft eye movements. Brittney was the complete opposite, the almost frail looking young woman sat nearly curled in on herself. Arms tightly wrapped around her shoulders, her eyes never staying on one spot in the empty room, and if you looked under the table, you could see that her left leg kept nervously bouncing up and down. At any moment she might break from being left alone, this was a perfect example of the sit and stew method that Jack liked to put subjects through. Will wouldn't be surprised to see the woman jump when that door opened for the first time.

For the second time that day, he stood behind the one-way glass, arms crossed as he waited for the interrogation to begin. But instead of fighting off the urge to be in the room, he fought for time to hurry so the truth or some form of the truth to be finally reviled to him. To help put his battle fatigue thoughts at ease and perhaps move on. Though he still had the strong doubt that he was actually looking at the Black Widow on the other side of the glass. The image that he had conjured up when he had first thought of the profile, a shadow deep silhouette of the woman he often fit his mind into now laid over top of Brittney. And all Will could see was how that cut out photo shuttered and flickered over her. Desperate to a line itself to her form, but the more it fiddled, the more it arranged itself to her, the more it flickered in and out of existent. It was like watching a tv channel that did not have a strong reception and if you tried to adjust the antenna, maybe hit the television itself you could be gifted with a clear picture. At the moment that was how Will felt studying Brittney, that perhaps if he adjusted his thoughts and rearrange the profile, he might be given a clear picture.

"She doesn't seem like a cold-blooded killer now does she." Hannibal stated as he stood next to Will, also studying Brittney. He had only heard her voice once over the phone and the image he had conjured up matched her so well. Wide eyed and very timid it was clear to see how Will could easily pick up the submissive behavior and mouse like quality that poured off of the young woman in floods

"No she doesn't," Will breathed out, "but then again looks can be deceiving."

"Much like the intentions of the serpent that tempted Eve when it came to offering her the forbidden fruit."

"Yes, but when the snake offered her the fruit, he told her what would happen when she ate its flesh. The only deception that was done there was the form the demon took in order to slip into the garden. In order to get to God's greatest creation." Will said as he adjusted his stances and tilted his head slightly to the side as if that would help with the fuzzy picture, not noticing how Hannibal raised an eyebrow towards Will's statement. Hannibal was once again given slight insight into Will's thinking and his stance on good and evil.

"It sounds as though you condone the serpent's actions." Will let out a heavy breath through his nose and ran a hand over his mouth, shaking his head slightly.

"I wouldn't say condone, more like understand the tale as a whole."

"By putting blame on neither one of the characters and leaving it all to interpterion, much how you are leaving your view on this situation up to interpretations to others. By not giving

a direct answer when asked about the identity of the murderer." Will felt the sting of a bitter chuckle rack against his throat as he bit the inside of his cheek. This playing nice thing was starting to burn under his skin and it made him want to scratch at himself to help expose those burns to the cool outside air. To rip off the slowly pulled tight collar he was made to wear in order to stand inside the viewing room and watch the interrogation.

"I'm not leaving anything up to interpretation, I told you what I believed," Will turned his head slightly, to not directly look at Hannibal, but give him knowledge that he was. "What I felt towards this whole ordeal." Hannibal fully turned towards Will, giving him the full attention that Will did not grant him.

"That you felt uncertain, but in truth you only feel conflicted with yourself. You are still feeling a war going on inside yourself even though the drums have stopped and the battle had slowed. You don't understand what side you should truly be on. Because you face that whatever side you fall on, in the end you will have to face the negative outcome that follows." Hannibal, though he spoke with clarity and smoothness, his words were coated with barbwire that caught Will's mind as they passed over him. Tearing away chunks as it moved over him, leaving gaps of torn flesh that throbbed slowly in a painful rhythm, that revealed the truth to how he felt since he was left standing on Miranda's porch that morning. "And feeling that way will only end with you harming yourself."

A ripple of anger traveled over Will's body and he felt the sharp sting of flesh being punctured and the warm tang of copper tease his tongue. Will realized what he had finally done after teasing the soft flesh throughout the day with his teeth fueled by frustration, he had bit hard enough into his cheek that he actually punctured the abused tissue. Will swallowed the gathering blood the mixed with his saliva, feeling his throat click and he felt a small tang of relief when he could no longer taste any of the sickening rich tang of copper that coated his tastebuds. Will began to move to face Hannibal, but the click of the viewing room's door had stifled his movements and instead he went back to stare at the one-way mirror. Leaving Hannibal with another dull feeling of disappointment, he was looking forward to see what venomous words that might drip from Will's mouth now that he pushed him just enough to unhinge his stubbornly clasped jaw. Hannibal stared at Will's profile for a moment, before turning to look at who had interrupted a possible rich discussion, only to see once again it was Jack who had unknowingly put a stop to his ideal form of entertainment.

"I just finished debriefing Katz on the plan, she should be starting to interrogation any moment." Jack said as he walked around both Will and Hannibal, taking a spot next to Will. Unknowingly trapping the profile between them, Will took a subtle step back and the only one to catch the subtle attempt for space was Hannibal. Who granted the other another rare act of leniency and made no form of acknowledgment. Instead he turned his attention fully onto the young woman who sat on the other side of the glass. Ready to be picked apart with no way to protect herself, just as Will foreseen it happening when the first words of why she was there was brought into the world.

Everyone watched as Beverly walked into the room, Brittney jerked slightly from the door opening without any warning and turned towards the agent as she made her way over to the metal table. Once more proving to Will how opposite she was to handling the situation than Miranda was. Brittney didn't stand and demand what was going on, the movements she did was the slight jerk and watched silently as Beverly took the chair in front of her. Placing the

folder on the table, clasping her hands together and letting out a deep breath. Trying to set an atmosphere of ease to help get the caged woman to come out of her highly built world she retreated in, since left alone with only her anxiety filled thoughts keeping her company.

"Do you know why you are here Miss. Wilts?" Beverly asked as she tilted her head slightly, leaning back in her chair. Building more into the open atmosphere to help coax the skittish woman out of her shell. Brittney looked up from the table, uncrossed her arms and took a deep breath.

"You guys believe I have something to do with the death of four men," Brittney began to nibble at one of her nails. "That were all clients of Miss. Rhettford." She added, looking up at Beverley, waiting for the other woman to confirm the statement before her eyes traveled back on the table when no confirmation came.

"She was looking for approval." Will pointed out, Jack and Hannibal turned their heads to look over their shoulders waiting for Will to continue. "She answered the question and afterwards she sought out some form of approval from Beverly, this could be a sign that she will slowly answer the questions and play on the more dominant urge to please rather than the other urge to sink down and hide." Jack nodded his head, before they all went back to watching the interrogation.

"Speaking of Miss. Rhettford," Beverly spoke gliding past the statement and changing the topic that was laid out on the table. "Can you explain the relationship you have with her for me?" Beverly asked and Brittney stopped nibbling at her nail and slowly lowered her arm so it folded over the other one that was still held tightly around her chest.

"Oh, well I was her personal assistant for a while."

"Was?"

"Yeah umm, she suspended me a week ago, because she told me I was getting to uh personal with her and that I needed to learn when it was appropriate to contact her and understand work boundaries." Brittney's voice was soft as she began to stare at the far corner of the metal table.

"That must have been very shocking for you, I heard you were a very dedicated employee. Always doing the tasks assigned to you and always looking for ways to please the boss." Brittney simply nodded her head. "How long have you been employed to Miss. Rhettford?"

"Around four maybe five months," Brittney replied absent mindlessly, before she realizes the question and her eyes left the corner and she looked over at Beverly. "Why?"

"It's just that the time you started working for Miss. Rhettford matches the time frame of the murders. Now don't you find that a little suspicious?" Beverly asked, her tone was that of if they were simply talking about the weather and not about the dead. Brittney blinked a few times and it was as though you could see the question slowly sinking into her mind.

"Are you insinuating that I had something do with those killings, because that's just crazy."

“Is it?”

“Yes!” Brittney’s voice rose sharply and Will found himself taken back. He never expected such a pitch to come from the woman he labeled as mouse like. Brittney took a deep breath realizing what she sounded like and quickly went to correct herself. “It’s just impossible for you to believe that it’s true.” She said her voice once again quiet and small.

“Well, that’s a bit odd Miss. Wilts,” Beverly slowly moved to lean forward, Brittney watched with wide unblinking eyes. “Because we have means to believe that you are the cause for these four men’s death.” Unlike Jack who used a harsh tone and heavy body language, Beverly was smoother in her movements and tone. Cool and unwinding as she showed an aura of ease. A summers breeze compared to a harsh storm, both could pull you, but one would rip you around while the other easily guided you.

Brittney’s already wide eyes seemed to defied physics because they grew in size as they flashed up from the table and looked at Beverly head on. “What?” She stammered out as a look of disbelief began to form over her. She set her hands flat against the table, trying to stabilize herself as she opened and closed her mouth a few times. “How can that be possible. I barely knew these men and I heard of what this murderer did to them, how could you believe it to be me?” Panic easily coated her words and brought an octave to her voice as she stumbled around for a clear answer.

Beverly let out a sigh and began to pull out papers from the folder. “Because we have evidence that says you do Miss. Wilts.” She replied as she began to place photos in front of her. Brittney began to rapidly shake her head.

“No, that can’t be true. Please I don’t understand what’s going on here.” Brittney’s hands slowly turned into fists as she leaned into the table. Pleading for answers, while panic set in, as her eyes searched for anything that would tell her what was happening. But all Beverly did was slide a few photos her way, redirecting her attention and Brittney looked down at the photos. Her eyebrows knitted together as she stared at the photos. “I, I don’t understand.” She said softly as she picked up the photos, that looked like shots of random objects.

“This Miss. Wilts,” Beverly gently tapped at the first photo, “is a photo of the driver’s license that belong to Gavin Kramer, the last man found killed by the Black Widow. His license was found in your apartment.”

“Kramer?” Will’s voice was quiet if it wasn’t for the lull in the conversation and the lack of one in the room, his voice might have gone unnoticed. Jack and Hannibal once again turned to face Will, who had a vacant stare as he began to retreat into his thoughts. Piecing things together that he was not supplying to the rest of them.

“Does that name sound familiar Will?” Jack questioned as he fully turned his body to face the empath. For a moment Will did not answer, as he recalled the name and what value it might actually hold for him. He blinked a few times, showing that he was coming out of his thoughts and back into the present.

“Yes, the name does,” Will answered as he turned his attention towards Jack. “Brittney mentioned a Kramer last time I interacted with her.”

“That could be why she took the driver’s license, a way to cover her trail. She knew it would easily lead back to the company if you found out the identity of the man. Anything else?” Jack asked.

Will thought further back to the day, trying to recall all the information he could pick up between the small conversation between Brittney and Miranda. “He was a very unruly client of Miranda’s. Brittney mentioned how he refused to talk to her directly and only wanted to discuss business with Miranda.” He added as he wondered if he should mention the conversation that followed soon after Miranda had left the room. The information wasn’t new, not after Miranda brought it up and a part of Will wanted him to leave it alone to stay slightly submerged in the fog of obscurity. But if he brought it up now, it might help with interrogation and it could bring them closer to seeing if Brittney might actually be the Black Widow. The license was an already damning piece of evidence that Will hadn’t seen coming. If Brittney wasn’t involved then why did she hold the key to the man’s identity?

“There is something else,” Will added sucking in a sharp breath and biting the bullet. He could feel the two pairs of eyes sharpen on him with a pure look of intrigue. It sent a harsh ripple down his spine; it was too late to take the words back, they floated freely in the air and both Jack and Hannibal were quick to catch them. “That same day, after Miranda left to deal with Kramer, Brittney warned me about my relationship with Miranda.” There was no holding it back now, Will could tell the two were hungry for more information, stopping there would end with him getting bitten. The hungers were different from one another, but they could still be satisfied with what Will had to offer. “She had told me the issues Miranda had with her previous relationships, lied about some parts trying to paint Miranda in a bad light and tried to use a scare tactic on me. Telling me to be prepared for a future breakup and to not get comfortable.”

Though he knew this would help with the interrogation, it left a vinegar like taste behind to stain his tongue. It had him feeling like a layer of his skin had been ripped off of him, leaving another form of himself free for the viewing of others. It made him feel raw, almost vulnerable to let something delicate only he and Miranda shared with one another now out into the open. To be examined and used in the act of justice, turning it from something that helped bring him and Miranda closer, opening the door for them to walk through now turned into a key that would fit into a lock. The look in Lecter’s eyes did not help soothe the irritation that Will was starting to feel prickling at his skin. The man had a dark look pooling in his already blacken eyes, Will couldn’t quite understand the emotions that swirled around the older man. It was as though he had revealed something that was far more desirable to Lecter than what it really was, there was still a hunger in him and Will could tell the other was fighting the urge to push him into going into more detail.

“That bit of information might come in handy.” Jack commented with a slow nod of his head as reached for his phone and began to type something out on it. Will raised an eyebrow as he watched as Jack continue to type out a message, not in a good enough angle to actually see what the message was. He did manage to see Jack hit the send button before he turned his attention up and towards the glass. Will watched Jack for a few seconds as he tried to figure out what the man had just done, but his attention was caught when he noticed through the corner of his eye that Beverly moved. Will turned to watch as Beverly checked her phone and that was when it clicked. He already knew when he let that small amount of information slip

through his lips that Jack would take it all in and use it. He just wasn't prepared for Jack to use it so soon and not actually tell him that he was.

Beverly let out a staged sigh as she put her phone away and looked over at Brittney, whose eyes held a large amount of worry and curiosity. Will wondered how those two different emotions fit so easily into those large eyes.

"What is it?" Brittney asked as she clenched and unclenched her fists in small motions of fidgeting.

"Why don't you tell me a little bit more about yours and Miss. Rhettford's relationship," Beverly entwined her fingers together and slightly tilted her head to the side, in a curious manner. "Especially the real reason why she suspended you." There was soft tone of demand in her voice, not harsh enough to cause Brittney to retreat into herself, but enough that would make it known to her that this was a question that could not be walked around.

"I don't see what this has to do with anything."

"I believe you do Miss. Wilts. Now please answer the question."

Brittney took a deep breath, her fingers slowly opened as she placed her palms against the metal table. "Alright, even though Miss. Rhettford said the reason she suspended me was because I was having trouble with work place boundaries and achieving some tasks without looking for her impute. I know the real reason was because of what I told her boyfriend."

"And what did you tell Will?" Beverly asked, it felt unsettling for Will to hear his name in the context and what was about to follow.

"I only wanted to warn him, that's all." Brittney said in an almost desperate manner. "From the time I've worked for Miss. Rhettford, I noticed that she has an almost toxic relationship with the men she brings around and I just didn't want him to end up like them. He didn't deserve to be treated like the way she treated them that's all. Please you have to believe me, I didn't mean any harm."

"I want to believe you, Miss. Wilts, but a major part of the profile of the Black Widow is that she often deals with the pestering feeling of jealousy. Now I believe that you weren't really looking out for Will's wellbeing. No, you just didn't like the idea that Miss. Rhettford was in another relationship with someone." Brittney blinked a few times in astonishment and slowly shook her head in denial, Beverly slowly leaned forward in her chair. "Come on you and I both know that's the truth. That's why you were so eager to please her, make sure everything you did for her lived up to her standards. You started to have feelings for her and that was the only way you could express yourself."

The look slowly slipped away from Brittney's face, traveling way like water, and replaced with something more solid as her head slowly stopped shaking. Something that was hidden away from others that never really seen the light of day and Brittney's shoulders suddenly sagged and she let out a lung full of air.

“Fine,” She confessed and the three men hidden behind the one-way glass all held a look of surprise. Neither one of them expected such a turn. But then again Brittney was having a hard time putting up a fight when she was being gently pushed around. “Alright yes, I have some feelings for Miss. Rhettford okay, but is that such a bad thing only a simple crush. I mean you’ve seen her, met her. Can you really blame me for feeling the way I do?” She asked with a pleading expression and once again Will felt a small sting of sympathy for the young woman. To become victim to a one-sided attraction for someone who might be able fill a part of you, that seemed like a missing puzzle piece and know deep down that those strong unyielding feelings might never be reciprocated. It must have been very difficult to live with, trying to find ways to gain small amounts of praise and subtle acts of affection in any form to help curve those cravings. Only to know deep down that nothing will come from it, that the only way to actually cure the feelings were to act upon them and voice them out into the open. Yet that wasn’t something Brittney was capable of doing, letting her nerves control her actions and stay as the victim. So Will did feel a small dosage of sympathy for her and perhaps also a dash of pity as well.

“No, can’t say that I can, but what I’ve heard from Miss. Rhettford herself and seen the actual evidence that backs up her claim.” Beverly reached back into the folder and pulled out a white sheet of paper with a long list of something Will could not clearly see printed on it. Beverly slid the paper over to Brittney, who picked the paper up with hesitant hands. “You have a pretty hard time leaving her alone, I mean there isn’t a time in the day when you were not picking up the phone to call her. I mean three to six times a day excluding texts, during and after work.” Beverly let out a low whistle and shook her head, “I wouldn’t call what you feel is a simple crush on the boss, this looks like it’s teetering into obsession. That and trying to scare off her current boyfriend, doesn’t paint you in a good light.”

Brittney put down the paper. “I wasn’t trying to scare Will off, because I didn’t like the idea that Miss. Rhettford was dating him. What I said was true, I’ve seen how she was with her other boyfriends, listened to her bad mouth these men and her talking about leaving them soon because the fun was running out and she found them boring. I just wanted Will to understand that Miss. Rhettford has a really bad habit, that she’s known to date a lot of men for a short amount of time and drop them out of nowhere.”

“How odd,” Hannibal spoke and the two men were quick to turn their attention towards him. “Miss. Wilts completely ignored the obsession claim and focused more on being accused of trying to scare Will away.” Hannibal turned to look at Will. “Now why do you suppose she did that?”

“Perhaps she isn’t that aware of her tendency.” Jack supplied.

“She is aware and simply doesn’t see it as a bad thing, more willing to smooth down the misunderstanding that stung her. It’s something she can’t hide, even if she tired.” Will said, his attention turned back to the mirror.

“Now, I am having a hard time believing you Miss. Wilts. How we see it is that you couldn’t stand seeing Miss. Rhettford with all these men, watching her flirt with all the men that came to her and how they returned the attention, so you decided to take matters into your own hand. You found the worst of the men, the ones who reciprocated feelings, the ones that also

showed a little too much arrogant behavior, behavior that you don't really care for and you began to show them that you were more willing to succumb to their needs unlike Miss. Rhettford who was all talk. You also knew that Will wasn't going to be so easy to lure away, so you chose to use the scare tactic, too bad that didn't work as well. Instead it ended with you getting suspended. That's when you felt like everything you've built up was crumbling around you and so you acted fast, by luring away the last man Miss. Rhettford talked to one Gavin Kramer."

"No, no that's not true at all. That's all made up. I did no such thing or felt such ways." Brittney began to rapidly shake her head and her breathing was turning heavy. Before she took a large lung stretching breath and began to slowly calm down. "You can't prove that I had anything do with these men or their deaths." She stated in a calmer manner.

"Sad to say this Miss. Wilts, but we actually can." Beverly began to say and Brittney let out a sigh and ran both hands through her hair. She was becoming frazzled and looking for balance in this tilting anxiety pumping conversation, Beverly now faced the challenge of trying to pull the other woman away from burring in on herself. But this also opened the door for more emotional based answer that came out without going through a filter of thinking. Now would be a proper time to strike. "You see, along with the license we found in your apartment, we also found these." Beverly tapped another photo that sat in front of the crumbling woman. Brittney looked down at the second photo that laid in front of her and tilted her head slightly to the side, before picking up the photo.

"A pair of fabric scissors?" Brittney lowered her hand so she could look over at Beverly. "What do they have to do with all this?"

"Well, these fabric scissors were found next to the Kramer's license, along with something very interesting smudged on the pivot." Beverly took the third picture, a close up shot of the part mentioned where it was reviled a red smudge captured in the groove of the screw. "We found blood coating the screw, blood that when tested will no doubt be a match to Kramer's." Brittney stared at Beverly with a hard look of disbelief, before slowly swallowing. She reminded Will of the fish he often caught, wide eyes and jaw ajar, slowly taking in gulps of air as they hung on to the last ounce of life, they had in them.

"That," Brittney took a short breath, followed by another. "That can't be true, that's impossible." Brittney leaned forward in her chair, her hands once again forming closed fists. "You can't truly believe I am the, what did you call her, the Black Widow now can you?" Brittney asked her voice coated in desperation and her eyes pleading for understanding. "There has to be some way to prove that I am not this crazy murderer." Beverly leaned back in her chair and loosely crossed her arms.

"I mean there was a hair found at the crime scene that we believe to belong to the Black Widow, if you are willing to take a DNA analysis to prove that it's not yours it might help clear the air."

"Alright."

The building pressure of twisted anticipation pressed hard against Will's ribs; he felt his heart fighting to pump in a calm manner. He leaned against the cool metal desk; the only comfort

he so far felt as the coldness greeted his heat-soaked skin through his two layers. The desk he leaned against was a few feet away from the computer that Jimmy sat in front of with the rest of the team hovering over the scientist as he put input after input into the system. As though them standing over him and staring at the computer screen might make the whole DNA comparison work any faster than it could. Will simply watched a few feet away, as he chewed at his thumb's cuticle, trying not to focus on the heart smothering anxiety that filled his body like hardening cement. Soon he might find it actually hard to breath if he couldn't get his emotions under control.

But then how could he, at any moment he will be facing actual unmistakable evidence that revealed the identity of the woman who spent the last few months slaying rich assholes who acted as though they were untouchable. He would soon be given an answer, that he fought so hard against since this morning and soon there was no way of denying the outcome. Like how his mind kept trying to deny the idea the Miranda might be the one who left the hair behind in Kramer's pool of old drying blood. But if it was Miranda's hair that laid submerged in the dark thick liquid, then why did Brittney hold the evidence that pointed far more fingers towards her? It was all a confusing swirling cauldron that boiled inside of his mind. Will had thought that the interrogation with Brittney might actually clear away some of the thick fog, but all it did was increase the density. A sharp small sting drew Will away from that fog, he let out a small hiss as he pulled his thumb away from his mouth. To see a small dot of red slowly blooming over the raw red skin of his thumb.

First my cheek, now my thumb. I better find a better way to place my emotions before I start to get a taste for my own blood. Will thought tiredly as he lowered his thumb away from his mouth and turned his attention back to the group, with their backs turned towards him; all except Lecter. Who had turned himself slightly to peer over his own shoulder to gaze over at Will, with a slight tilt to his head and his eyes were focused on Will's abused thumb. Before they slowly move up the length of Will's arm until they meet Will's flickering gaze and Hannibal slowly smiled at him. Will felt an odd heat rush to claim his face and his eyes quickly turned to focus back on the computer screen. Hannibal watched as Will tightened his arms around his chest and took a deep breath through his nose. Not noticing how that smile, twisted into a smirk at his own subtle accomplishment, before he also turned his attention back to computer. Interested to see what the two samples had to reveal and who will be sent to the metal confines of a cell, with cuffs digging painfully into tender flesh of wrists and a label that they would never be able to escape.

"How much longer until the results are in?" Jack voiced as he walked into the room, drawing everyone's attention away from the computer screen. That at this point Will speculated was taking longer, just because it had several pairs of hungry eyes on it.

"We only need a few more minutes to go." Jimmy replied as he looked over his shoulder and towards his boss. Jack simply gave him a nod of acknowledgment, before Jimmy went back to wait for the results like the rest of them.

"You know I don't really see why we need these results so badly," Zeller spoke as he leaned away from looking over Jimmy's shoulder and straightening himself out. "I mean we found the murder weapon and the last victim's ID in Miss. Wilts apartment. I'd say that's enough to make an arrest."

“Just because you found two key components doesn’t mean the charges might stick,” Will spoke up, “any lawyer can claim that the evidence was planted.” Will stiffly turned to look at the group fully, “We need something they can’t dismiss.” his eyes were down cast and his expression sober. Zeller crossed his arms, tilted his head, his own look was suspicious, as he thought over Will’s monotone words.

“Now, wouldn’t you out of all of us, want to jump the gun and go with the first two strong pieces of evidence that is pointing towards Miss. Wilts. That way we can all stop focusing on your girlfriend.” Zeller pointed out and Will lifted his gaze to look over at the man, his eyebrows knitted together for a split second, before relaxing. But Will still held a confused expression, wasn’t he supposed to be playing nice, staying out of the way while still pointing the group in the right direction. If so, why was he being chastised for doing that? A part of Will wanted to make the same claim as Zeller did, go up to Jack and point out the obvious and have him let Miranda go. He knew that with this analysis it would help make sure that cell door stayed locked with the right person behind the bars and then this whole web of a mess of a case would be cleared away like a pesky cobweb. Before Will could respond to the statement, Beverly stepped into the conversation.

“He’s only stating the obvious here Zeller. We can’t go jumping the gun and it’s harder to argue against DNA than it is to argue against the other. You of all people should know this.” Beverly spoke putting her hands on her hips and hardening her stance. Beverly held a strong point and spoke Will’s thoughts almost word for word and like always they seemed to be taken into consideration as long as they weren’t coming from his own mouth.

“Listen all I’m doing is pointing out how odd it is that he hasn’t really been trying to put up a fight when it comes to proving his girlfriend’s innocents.” Zeller shot back gesturing towards Will, but talking as though he wasn’t even in the room. “I mean if it was my girlfriend, I would be fighting tooth and nail here.”

“First you would actually need to have a girlfriend.” Jimmy mumbled as he continued to work. Blatantly ignoring the look Zeller sent him.

“And how exactly is he supposed to act, go all lone wolf, hunt down his own evidence to prove her innocents. Is that what you want to see him do?” Beverly raised an eyebrow and waited for Zeller to respond along with Will; who waited for whatever retort that would come out of the investigators mouth. Trying to ignore the blunt sting that Zeller’s observation had caused him. Because in truth he would have liked to be able to do what Beverly just described, gone out and looked for more evidence to point every finger away from Miranda. Go over to where Brittney lived and comb through the space until he found more proof that might be hidden from view. But in reality, he knew he wasn’t allowed to do that, no he was barely allowed to sit on the side lines at the moment. The collar was still around his neck and Lecter still held the leash. He once again felt like one of his dogs, made to sit and listen, only acknowledged when he was needed or when he made a sound.

“That’s enough you two,” Jack cut in with the tone of a strict parent as he stepped forward, making it known that he was willing to step in between the two. Who took the role of squabbling siblings. “Jimmy how much longer do we have to wait. Because a few minutes

doesn't tell me much." Jack said though the sentence was pointed to the third of the group, Jack's gaze stayed on both Beverly and Zeller.

"Hold on one more input and we are," Jimmy slowly brought out each of his words. As he attempted to gain himself more and more time, that wasn't really available to him. "There we go, we now have the identity of our infamous Black Widow and her name is."

Will took a deep breath, relishing in the fresh air for the second time that day. Feeling his chest expand with some ease, he was surprised that his ribs didn't crack and turn to dust. The open air felt nice after spending nearly all day inside that large building. Giving nothing, but heated air that threated to dry his nose and make his lungs feel as though they were filled with cotton. Stepping outside to be greeted by actual sunlight, instead of artificial light that made his eyes burn and his head slightly throb. To be out in the actual open made some of the tension that liked to call his muscles home slowly fade away. Making it easier for Will to actually focus on his surroundings and regain some control of the wild rollercoaster that was his mind.

"It's just unbelievable," Miranda spoke as she waked though the door that Will held open for her, before stopping to wait for him, turning around to face him with a soft expression. "I mean to think Brittney being the Black Widow all along." Miranda slightly shook her head in disappointment.

"It does seem almost inconceivable when one thinks about it." Hannibal spoke as he walked through the door after Miranda, in a far more at ease speed. He gave Will a subtle nod of thanks before fully stepping out of the way. Will returned the nod and let the door close shut on its own as he walked over to stand by Miranda and Hannibal noticed how quick she was to wrap her arms around his, pressing her body as close to his as physically possible. "Miss. Wilts did not display signs of being this Black Widow, she almost seemed quite the opposite actually." Hannibal spoke as he looked over to Miranda, who simply tilted her head paired with a look of pure curiosity.

"And what would those signs actually be Hannibal?" Miranda spoke as she began to walk towards the steps with Will keeping pace with her. Hannibal felt his muscles slightly tense hearing his name fall out of Miranda's mouth. It had his jaw threaten to tighten on him as his teeth begged to grind together to help alleviate the tension.

"Something more dominant," Will spoke as he focused more on the steps they were taking down to the sidewalk. "Brittney showed more and more of her submissive skittish behavior even when pushed. I profiled the Black Widow as someone who would shed that side as soon as possible. Like taking off an ill-fitting suit."

"But, wouldn't it be possible that the only reason why she hasn't shed this personality is because she knows that's what you are looking for?" Miranda asked. Will stopped and pressed his lips together in thought, his eyes fixated one something far in the distant as he traveled through his now clear mind.

Are you genuinely taking her question into consideration Will, are you that desperate to find ways to fill in those hollow holes that were left behind from that tedious war you were trying to find cover from. That you would so easily latch onto the first observation that comes across

your path, that offers you some first aid to help patch those wounds you are suffering. But all that first aid kit has to offer is measly gauze, what you need dear boy are sutures. Hannibal thought as he studied Will's transfixed expression, watching as Miranda's words acted as some sort of temporary adhesive to keep his torn mind closed.

"That could make some sense," Will finally spoke readjusting his focus to look at Miranda. "Her keeping up the façade as long as possible, to try and have us rethinking our initial thoughts of her. It would also help with her defense." He said with a small shoulder shrug as he began to walk down the steps again.

Why am I not fully surprised that you found a way to actually find something useful to piece together in the pathetic effort to self-heal yourself. It must be that bottomless amount of imagination that constantly has your mind drowning, gasping for air and reaching for solid land that is always out of reach. I guess a desperate man is not a picky man. Hannibal thought as he watched once more as Miranda pressed herself closer to Will and she let out a soft breath through her nose and slightly shook her head.

"Well good thing that hair says otherwise," she said as she looked over at Will and gave him a soft smile. "Or else I would still be sitting in that cold eerie room, scared, and confused. Not sure what was going to happen next." Miranda said softly with a drop of velvet worry in her tone as she leaned over to rest her head on Will's shoulder, who instinctively reached over with his free hand to place it over the hands the gripped his arm and leaned his head over to rest on top of Miranda's. Hannibal had to fight the ugly urge to roll his eyes as he tried to focus his attention elsewhere for a while. So he wasn't subjugated to yet another born to be act of affection from the two.

"Yes, that would be quite dreadful." Hannibal commented through a deep breath, easily breaking the scene that Miranda was trying to build, catching the slight annoyed look that the woman sent him and that Will did not notice. As they finally reached the bottom of the steps.

"Yes, you are so right Hannibal." Miranda said as she gave him a smile, that held the right amount of fake warmth that it could pass off as genuine to the untrained eye. Hannibal knew his patience for this woman was being tested, he could feel it slipping through his tightly clenched fist. Here he was trying to bury himself under her skin and yet she managed to do the same thing to him with simple ease, it was perplexing how he allowed such an act to be done to him. If it wasn't for the current company that Miranda had sunk her talons in, he might have considered using more brazen tactics. Drop only a small portion of his person suit, slip one sleeve off perhaps two and then let the predator he kept underneath out to roam where it would find sustenance fighting against hers.

"I'm going to go get the car." Will spoke breaking the silent stand off the two were having. Both with clearly forced smiles playing at their faces. Miranda's was more false warmth while Hannibal's was stone cold, neither reached their eyes and neither convey anything, but false niceness. If Will wasn't as emotionally drained as he felt, he might of thought about breaking it up and voicing the fact he wasn't clueless. But he couldn't conjure up the energy that was needed to deal with any push back the two would give him.

"Oh, alright I'm sure Hannibal won't mind keeping me company while I wait for your return." Miranda spoke not breaking eye contact or shifting her smile as she continued to

look at the doctor. “Wouldn’t you.” She tilted her head to the side, daring him once more like she had when offering to drop formalities, knowing fully well he couldn’t deny her and it had that beast inside of him raising its hackles and admitting a low growl.

“I wouldn’t mind in the slightest.” Another blatant lie the woman had forced out of his refined mouth and it set a burn of stomach acid up his throat. Though he didn’t break his view from Miranda he did notice the way Will’s shoulders slightly deflated and he picked up the heavy breath the younger man let out. It had him question what Will knew and wasn’t telling the rest of them, perhaps he seen the tension and was trying to sever it. But Miranda did not allow it and neither had he, he wouldn’t put it past the empath. Always aware of what others tried to keep invisible and always trying to keep himself distant while attempting to stay present at the same time. No wonder his mind always felt crowded.

“Alright it shouldn’t take me that long,” Will said as he slid his arm out of Miranda’s hold, “I didn’t park that far.” Will began to rummage through his pocket in search for his car keys, but was stopped when Miranda turned finally breaking contact from Hannibal and reached over gently guiding Will to turn to look at her with her fingers softly caressing under his jaw. When he was fully looking at her with confused eyes. Miranda smiled softly at him, before pressing herself closer to him.

“I’ll be waiting right here sweetheart.” She practically purred as she leaned closer and gave Will a drawn-out kiss. Her fingers brushing lightly under his jaw to edge him closer into the surprised kiss, before elegantly sliding her fingers down the side of his neck, where her hand brushed against his collar. Subtly pushing the collar open and her fingers gently began to play at the dark mark that still blemished his skin. Hannibal abruptly turned his gaze a way as if he was surprised by a blinding light, he knew what Miranda was doing and he wasn’t going to entertain the idea of her practically waving it around him. Even though he felt his jaw creek from the hard pressure he was putting it through. Miranda slowly broke the kiss and smiled softly at Will, who looked at her with hooded eyes and slightly parted lips. “There is no rush, so take your time.” She said softly with a gentle tilt of her head as she lowered her hand and took a small step back.

Will let out a soft breath of a chuckle as a crooked smile tried to form on his lips. “Alright whatever you say darlin’.” He said with a slight shake of his head, like what Miranda hadn’t just done was blatant peacocking and simply being playful. Before he turned and began to head over to where ever he had parked his car. Leaving Miranda and Hannibal to stand alone at the steps, with only the few birds that hadn’t migrated yet for the up-and-coming winter to keep them company.

Miranda watched as Will walked away with a fawn expression, before he turned a corner. That was when she shifted her attention over to Hannibal, who still held his gaze on the direction Will had walked off in. Before his eyes leveled with Miranda’s and he raised an eyebrow, he knew she had something to say to him, something she’s been dying to get out. But Miranda did not utter a single word, she simply stood there in front of him with her hands neatly clasped and her head tilted slightly with her own eyebrow raised. As if basking in some hidden knowledge, that she was all too pleased to keep to herself.

“I must say Miranda,” Hannibal spoke as he took a slight step towards her, his voice and body language both laced in a cool calm refine composer. “You have taken this noisome news of Miss. Wilts arrest quite well.” He said as watched as Miranda’s eyes heavily searched over his facial expression. Looking for a hidden meaning behind his sentence, something he wasn’t going to allow her to see. “Along with the knowledge that you came so close to falling into such an impenetrable fate yourself.”

“Oh, really why thank you Hannibal.” Miranda said with a smile as she took another of his false complements and used it to feed her own ego with ease. Instead of poking around to uncover what was lying behind his words. “I know most would find this whole ordeal very troubling perhaps even terrifying,” she said as she took a few of her own casual steps towards him. “Being accused of such a heinous act of slaughter.” Miranda’s voice was smooth as she continued to talk with slight hand motion, it was as though they were simply talking about the latest television show and their thoughts about the new episode. “Only to have all those accusations drift away from oneself as soon as those sharp eyes were pointed in the right direction to look.” Miranda stopped and looked at Hannibal, waiting for him to speak. But he simply continued to study her motions and tone, he knew something was hidden under those fluid words, something far more jagged with a sharp piercing point.

“Very fortunate that those eyes were given something to focus on.” He replied, while he searched for what lay hidden under her words, the same way he knew she was doing with his. Miranda gave a very tight lipped smiled, pleased by his words and possible understanding.

“Yes, very fortunate indeed.” Miranda let out a deep well performed sigh as she turned her head to look up at the building, they walked out of moments prier. Shifting not only her mood, but the conversations as well; to something more solum “Though I do feel a small amount of pity for Brittney. Poor little thing locked away, accused of committing all those murders all in the name of jealousy,” Miranda slowly turned her head back to face Hannibal. “All those lives taken because she couldn’t handle such a pathetic emotion.” She added and Hannibal could see the cool drip of poison in those words, that coated her teeth as she smiled. He seen the bait in front of him, dangling in the air beckoning him to latch on to it, but he knew himself above that. He recalled what happened last time he was poked at and he wasn’t going to fall victim to it, not again. Besides he caught something in Miranda’s sentence that was far more interesting.

“That’s odd,” He spoke and Miranda’s smile faltered for a second, before naturally falling away. “You said accused of committing those crimes, as though you yourself don’t actually believe she was the one behind the four deaths.” Hannibal pointed out with a raised eyebrow and searching gaze. Miranda blinked a few times and Hannibal felt an almost pleasurable warmth seeing how he had managed to throw her off. By simply pointing out a flaw in her words, sometimes all it took was something so minuscule like using a poor choice of words that could bring someone down.

Miranda let out a small hum as she pursed her lips together in thought. “It does sound like that now doesn’t it.” She said as she adjusted her stance and brought a finger up to her lips as she put on a show of thinking over her words. “But then again does it really matter what I honestly believe in all this.” She pulled her finger away so she could elegantly wave her hand about. “I mean in the end of the day she’s locked up for being the Black Widow and I simply

am not.” Miranda said with a pleased smile and an ugly hint of smugness laced elegantly in her tone. Before Hannibal could continue the conversation, bring more of what was only briefly teased out of Miranda. Because he knew something was flashed in front him like when you see something move in the corner of your eye, but you are too slow to see all of it. Only giving a fleeting glimpse of whatever it was that haunted your view. Hannibal was simply not fast enough to capture all of it, before Will’s Volvo pulled up to the curb and Miranda turned her attention to the car with a smile.

“Well, looks like my ride is here.” She said with a pleased expression as she looked over at Hannibal and he notice the smile widen in the knowledge that he wasn’t going to get anything more out of her. “It was nice talking to you again Hannibal.” Miranda simply stated with more over used friendliness that felt like jagged nails clawing into Hannibal’s nerves. Miranda began to walk over to the car, only to stop a short distance. Miranda looked over her shoulder towards Hannibal. “Perhaps we should get together some time. You, myself and Will, that is and hopefully nothing comes up again like it did last night.” She mused with a smooth taunt voice before she elegantly shrugged her shoulders and continued to walk over to the car. Will made his way over to her side of the car and opened the door for her, Miranda smiled with a soft gesture of being taken back by the kind gesture. Reaching over and placing a delicate hand on the side of his face, in a gentil caress even going as far as softly rubbing her thumb over his cheek. All held together with a carrying tender look in her eyes that tied into her warm smile, before she pulled away and stepped into the car.

Will closed the door behind her, his own smile decorating his face before he turned to Hannibal. Who notice the smile twitch as though Will had subconsciously realized who he was looking at and needed to change his appearance to something more guarded. Yet that smile still lingered on his face, it was stronger than Will’s need to preserve his other more vulnerable emotions. The emotions that he hardly let anyone see, that were kept protected behind high stone walls. Walls that Miranda had manage to step past with little struggle, while Hannibal was still going through the meticulous screening process and slowly gifted small dosage of those emotions. Hannibal watched as Will raised his hand in a gesture of goodbye, the doctor returned the gesture with a well-placed smile and a simple bow of the head. His own gesture of goodbye. That Will nodded back too, before he walked back to his side of the car with Hannibal’s eyes trailing his movements, only for them to quickly ricochet over to Miranda. Who sat straight back in the car, staring right back at him with sharp enjoyment. Those eyes only left him when Will entered the car and she put all her attention back towards the profiler.

Hannibal battled the glare that wanted to claim his face while he watched as the Volvo drove off. Once again trying to ignore that hard cracks forming inside of his being, feeling those breaks ooze hot burning tar onto his muscles. Where the toxin would slowly seep into his veins and melt past his muscles and coat his bones. The infection was starting to take an ugly toll on him, one that was becoming far more strenuous to ignore the more he had to witness Miranda latching on to Will and Will latching right back. For a while there while Miranda was facing a fate that would have her permanently removed from Will, Hannibal was given an opening to slowly pull the man away from her. To guide him into leaning on him more than Miranda. As though he was given a second chance, but now that chance was ripped from his iron grip and it was ran over by the car that was heading back to the woman’s home. Realization dripped into Hannibal’s mind as he stood there at the steps of Behavioral building

by himself watching Will's car grow smaller and smaller in the distance. That despite his tailored pride, despite his own well-fed ego, regardless of those two conflicts that had his mind in a similar, but more organized state like Will's own. That he'd actually preferred the idea of Miranda being the Black Widow rather than that little field mouse that was currently waiting for the very noose that was once wrapped around Miranda's throat, to snap when the judges gavel came down and the sentence was called out.

The drive to Miranda's house, was filled with a warm pleasant silence. The only sound in the car was the low sound that trickled through the spikers supplied by the radio. Will wasn't paying much thought to the song that emanated from the speakers, his thoughts were more roaming around the fact that Miranda was in his car, no longer being held for questioning or being accused of being the killer he had been trailing for months. Instead she was sitting in his passenger seat, her attention turned to looking out the window, watching all the trees that came by and with her left hand resting gently on top of his thigh. Will found himself often glancing over just to catch a few moments of Miranda, as though he was confirming to himself more than anything that she was there with him.

As if she could pick up on his thoughts Miranda turned to him with a smile. "What is it sweetheart?" She said with an amused chuckle and a soft tilt of her head. Will watched as her hair slid down her shoulder and how her eyes searched his face. Will let out his own hesitant chuckle as he tried not to shake his head.

"It's nothing," Will took a deep breath and leaned furth back into his seat, noticing how his muscles slowly began to relax for him. "It's just today's events were very."

"Strenuous, nerve racking, exhausting." Miranda let out another light laugh, "I could go on to be honest." She smiled. "But in all honestly I'm just glad it's all over with." Miranda sighed as she too leaned back into her seat and Will caught how her body began to decompress, her eyes fluttering closed as she let out another breath. Will felt an odd sense of warmth seeing Miranda relaxed in his car, knowing that the day was behind them and there was no longer a threat hanging over them. It felt nice and he could have sworn he felt that familiar flutter brush lightly along his worn-down nerves. Its presence had an almost healing effect on him, he could just picture those nerve ends being closed by the feather as it fluttered by. It was nice and like the silence it was welcoming. The two began to resettle in the quiet calmness of the car ride.

"Can I ask you something?" Miranda softly spoke, cutting through the silence as she turned her head to look at him. Will turned his eyes off the road for a brief moment to give her confirmation that though his eyes were going to be on the road he was still going to listen and pay attention to her.

"Sure, what's on your mind?" Will caught how Miranda shifted in her seat, sitting up more, and turning more of her body towards him. She held a look of perplex as she searched her thoughts for the right words to say.

"I would like to know, if I," She let out a faint huff of a short laugh and even shook her head slightly. "It sounds so stupid now that I'm thinking about it."

Will looked over to her and placed his right hand on top of hers, taking it gently in his hand and giving it an accouraging squeeze. “Hey, I doubt that it’s stupid. Please tell me what’s wrong.” Miranda let out a soft breath, her shoulders slumping slightly and she returned the hand squeeze.

“It’s something Lecter observed about me, while we were waiting for your return.”

Will knitted his eyebrows together as he tried to predict where this sentence was headed. “Really and what did he have to observe?” He asked with a small hint of caution that made the question come out of his mouth slower than normal. He knew how Lecter liked to search in others mind and pick around their behaviors, to then point it out at them just so he could watch them squirm at being stripped naked.

Miranda slightly shook her head again and turned her attention to her lap. “He just thought it was odd on how well I was taking Brittney’s incarceration. That I was I don’t know taking it so well I guess.” Miranda looked back up at Will with a worried expression, “is that wrong of me for taking this all so casually. Should I be more shaken up about all of this, because to be honest I am it’s just.”

“You are accustomed to carrying it all inside yourself. Instead of letting others see what you truly are feeling.” Will supplied as he glanced back over at Miranda and by her open expression, he knew he had hit his mark. “You have nothing to explain or worry over. How you react is simply your own reaction to this whole mess. It shouldn’t be up to Lecter or anyone else on how you should or shouldn’t carry yourself. They simply look for something that doesn’t quite fit to whatever they deem as socially normal and try to make you feel out of place,” Will let out a huff. He knew that would have happen as soon as he left Miranda and Lecter alone together. He was the barrier that kept them at bay, kept inside whatever person suit they wore around one another and as soon as he was out of the picture, his eyes no longer watching over them. Those suites would slowly come off leaving them there in their true attire. “It’s all in order to burry under your skin and find a way to pick you apart from the inside out. In all honestly, I believe you reacted just fine.” He said giving Miranda’s hand another gentle squeeze paired with a more reassuring smile. “You reacted like yourself and that’s all that matters.”

Miranda looked at Will and a small smile formed on her face as a look of understanding came over her. “Thank you.” Her voice was soft and delicate, it almost rivaled with the volume of the radio. “You seem to always know the right thing to say.”

Will let out a short chuckle, “Well, I was bound to get it right eventually, most of the time I seem to have my own foot in my mouth.”

“Not when it comes to me you don’t.” Miranda said with her own soft form of reassurance that Will hadn’t realize that he was in need of until it was given to him. As she squeezed his hand in hers, before she went back to looking out the window without letting go of Will’s hand. Leaving Will with his own small smile as he turned to look at the road, the flutter that roamed his body still present and making a second round.

They finally pulled up to Miranda’s house. “Do you want me to accompany you inside or?” Will asked as he parked the car and was finally able to place all his attention on Miranda

instead of trying to split it. Miranda stared up at her house for a few beats and he watched as her eyes slightly dropped away. Will could see that she was battling with her thoughts that she was holding something inside of her that she didn't know how to actually voice. So he waited patiently for her to come to her own conclusion.

"My first initial thought was yes, that I didn't want to be alone, but," Miranda turned to look at Will, her expression downcast and her eyes didn't look directly at him. "I was thinking on the way over that maybe after what has happened today and the startling realization of what Brittney had actually done. Along with how terrifyingly close to home that it all was that maybe perhaps."

"You could use some time to yourself, to be able to gather up any more of those ill thoughts and find a way to understand your own emotions." Will once more supplied and Miranda ducked her head and with a relieved smile to pair with it.

"That's exactly what I was thinking." Miranda said looking back at Will with a smile before it turned to something akin to worry. "You're not upset are you that after all this tearing done to us that I would want some alone time so I can process everything and get things in order for not only myself, but the company as well. Now it won't be for long you understand just for a while until I." Miranda slowly trailed off. Her voice easing down and her quick speak slowing when Will reached over to caress the side of her face with his hand.

"It's all right, I could never be upset with you for wanting some isolation. Trust me I completely understand the need." Will felt Miranda relaxed in his touch and he watched as she reached up and placed her hand over the hand that softly caressed her face. "I also understand that these things also take time and if you need the space than that's also all right by me."

"I don't know why I thought you wouldn't understand," Miranda breathed out as lowered her hand and Will's followed. "Thank you again." She smiled before leaning over and softly kissing Will, her hand came up to caress the side of his face. Her touch sent a warm ripple through his body marring with the flutter that was slowly drifting away. The feeling of her velvet lips against his and the light touch of her hand. It all had a soothing effect for him, clearing away whatever havoc that still lingered behind that wanted to reemerge from the rubble from the war. Will felt it all drift past him in a wisp of warmth that was trickling down to that blossom planted in his chest. Will once again reached up to caress Miranda's face and he slowly pulled her towards him as well. Here Miranda had just finished telling him that she wanted some time alone and he was more than happy to comply to those wishes, but she was also making it so very difficult to follow through.

Miranda began to move back, breaking the kiss and Will felt her drift out of his touch along with the way her fingers tenderly left his face. The two simply sat there watching over one another, neither saying a word for a few more moments. Both soaking in the others presence, before Miranda let out a breath and turned her attention back to her house. "I really should get going, I have lot of work to handle now and I just know word is going to spread like wild fire." She said before she ducked her head and let out a weak chuckle. "I almost don't want to, but I know it has to be done." She added, she turned to Will and gave him a smile, who easily returned it. "I guess this is actually goodbye."

“You want me to walk you to your door at least?” Will asked as he went to go grab his door handle, but he felt Miranda’s hand on his shoulder. Stopping his actions and he turned to face her.

“During any other time I would love for you to walk me to the door,” Miranda dropped her hand from Will’s shoulder. “But I know if you do, then I wouldn’t be able to stop myself from inviting you inside and then this whole wanting to be alone thing would all just go out the window.” She explained with a weary smile. “So, please don’t take this the wrong way when I turn down your offer.”

Will let out a short chuckle and shook his head slightly. “You don’t need to worry about me taking what you said wrong because I know what you mean and I respect your decision on just wanting to say our goodbyes here instead of at your front door.” Will explained as he watched Miranda relax from whatever weight that was still pressing on her shoulders being lifted.

“Okay and I promise that I’ll still keep in touch and all that.” She added with a playful chuckle, “Well I’ll try, but who knows how crazy this will all actually be. Who knows maybe it will all blow by without so much as a squeak.” There was a hopeful note in her tone, but Will knew that the note he heard really wasn’t that strong and it was more played to help ease Miranda’s thoughts.

“Yeah hopefully.” Will replied as he watched as Miranda got out of his car and made her way to her front door. With Will watching her all the way, wondering what would have happened if she had taken him up on the offer. What would the rest of the day hold for them then, would it be filled more with that light touch of that domestic feeling that had been roaming in the background of his thoughts. Perhaps they would go back to his place and follow through with those weekend plans they had made. Take a short drive to that river with a pair of fishing poles and spend the rest of the day just the two of them surrounded in quiet of the forest with the soft roar of the river. That would have been nice, but that was only a probability, a day dream. Miranda wanted some time to herself and a part of Will also wanted his own form of isolation. There were far too many inputs through the day, too many inner struggles and trying not to step on toes that he hadn’t realized how drained he actually was until he was alone in his car. Finally out of the way of prying eyes and digging thoughts of others. So caught up in his own mind that he almost missed it when Miranda turned around with a smile and blew him a kiss from her porch, before giving him an elegant wave and disappeared inside.

Will sat in his car for a few seconds staring at the front door, regaining his thoughts and he let out a fawned chuckle when he realized that Miranda had blown him a kiss. He turned his car on and began to drive back home. It was almost unbelievable how the day was starting to end for him, it didn’t feel real at all, it almost felt wrong in some sense. Like it wasn’t supposed to end with Miranda back at her home after being taken in by Jack only hours prior with the title Black Widow being pinned to her. A part of him felt as though it was supposed to end with it there, with Miranda behind bars and with him broken hearted trying to make sense of the aftermath. Instead he was graced with the opposite and it felt eerily nice to be given that. Will hadn’t even realized he still held a smile on his face until he glanced up at his review mirror and caught it still sitting there.

Once Bitten

Chapter Summary

It was suppose to be a night of rekindling. Where Will and Miranda could come back together after being apart and enjoy their time down memory lane and feel the warmth they have for each other. To bad fate had another plan.

Chapter Notes

First off I want to say I am so sorry for such a long wait for this chapter. I did not intend it to take this long, I actually had this chapter planned of a long time. Too bad the chapter did not want to go follow that plan at all. So I apologize again for the long wait, I'll try to be better when it comes to the next one. I also want to say thank you to all the lovely comments and the kudos. I hope you all enjoy this chapter :)

It had been two weeks since Will had last seen Miranda, she had kept her promise of still staying in touch with him. Mornings were filled with good mornings and how did you sleep texts; the days were spent the same way. In-between lectures and paperwork Will found himself responding to Miranda's messages. Where she would ask him how his day was going and he would reply with either a light summary of how is latest class went or try not to ramble off about the mind-numbing papers he had to fill out in order to tie up any loose ends that came with completing a case. It was so unfavorable that Will felt himself almost missing the other numbness that came with going over the list of past lovers that had his mind in a near coma like state for months. But what kept him going was the idea as soon as the last file was off to Jack's office then the whole ordeal could be put to rest. Buried in a deep grave and be left amongst the rest of the tombstones that filled the cemetery of closed cases that he had worked on. Sometimes Will didn't know how he should feel when he looked back at the cemetery and stared at the rows of graves. There would be that small pulse of pride that tried to fill out his chest, knowing it was his doing that had gotten those criminals/murderers off the street and placed in a cage. But then there was the cold tiredness that filled his bones and made him wonder if it was all actually worth it in the end, because he knew that the cemetery would only expand with his help or not. Could he find a way to side step the exhaustion, sleepless nights, and aches in order to keep his role as groundkeeper for this place. He never truly knew.

But Will put all those thoughts aside as he continued to text Miranda about his time dragging day, waiting for the last class to be taught and last key stroke to be made. Before he could pack up his belongings and bid the academy a day's farewell. So he could drive home in the

quiet of his car and be greeted by his dogs when he arrived to his own piece of isolation. Where he would stitch himself back together, finding every tear in his suit and run a needle and thread through it. All so he could have those seams be pulled and harshly tugged at the next days.

The nights during their time apart weren't the same as the mornings and afternoons. Instead of digital words and silly emojis; Will still felt a round chuckle fill his chest every time he would see the round faces, or cartoon animals grace his phone, along with the fact that he would respond to those emojis with his own. Something he never in his life thought he would be doing, often leaving that function alone. Only scrolling over to that area either on accident or when either Alana or Beverly would encourage him to try it, because it's "just silly fun." Which Will would roll his eyes towards before complying to the request. Now, he found himself using them in response to Miranda sending them, another part of him she had coaxed out. But at night there were no text messages instead the night was filled with long phone calls, where Will would find himself either mindlessly wondering around his home with the phone pressed to his ear, keeping his body moving as they wondered through their own conversation. Only stopping at odd places to finally become still, like at his stairs where he would lean on the banister or sit on one the steps. One time after one of their long night phone calls, he found himself all the way upstairs and at the end of the hall with his back pressed up against the door pf his hall closet. Other times Will would sit in his recliner with a glass of Glenmorangie Signet in his hand as he tried not to get lost in Miranda's elegant voice. His eyes slowly drifting shut, just so he could picture her on the other end of the phone. Imagining how her enticing lips formed the syllables she spoke or the smile she formed when they were on a light airy topic. The way she was sitting on her couch, legs curled nestled under her, wondering if she was also nursing a drink like he was. Perhaps she was also wondering around her house absent mindlessly like he would do.

Being on the phone with her, hearing her voice and catching slight sounds of movements, had two contrasting effects on Will. One it made him feel warm and docile, it helped ease his mind after a long day. Making it easier to shed the workday away and relax in the solitude of his home. Then there was the other effect, that had him aching to be in her presence, to actually see her smile. The way her nose wrinkled when she laughed. How warm she felt pressed against his body as they walked down the street hand in hand or arms entwined together. It made their time apart difficult to pull through, it had him wondering if he should bring up how long it had been since they were actually together and perhaps, they should meet up. But then again, he wanted to give Miranda her space, wait until she was ready. The last thing he wanted to do was push her, especially when she wasn't ready and was still in need of her own space.

Alana walked into Will's class room and found the professor sitting at his desk typing his reply to Miranda's latest text. Where she was wondering if he had finished preparing next week's test like he complained of having to do or if he had once again put it off for his future self to fret over. When Will had read the teasing text he found himself fondly rolling his eyes at the message and couldn't stop the soft smile that formed on his face; even if he wanted to, before sending her his answer. Which was yes he had actually prepared the test and did not fall for the temptation of putting it off. Will had set his phone down when he had noticed Alana walking in and he gave her a crooked welcomed smile.

“Hello Alana what brings you by?” He asked as stood up from his desk to properly greet her and walked around to the front of his desk.

“Oh, no reason,” Alana answered with a nonchalant shrug as she continued to walk into his class room. Eyes slowly looking around the room as she crossed her arms in front of her. Will knew from the obvious over played nonchalant behavior that she wasn’t being truthful in the slightest. “Just finished my own lecture and thought I’d stop by,” her eyes finally landed on him, “That’s all.”

Will raised his eyebrow and slowly leaned against his desk. “Really, you just decided to stop by because,” Will looked around the room, almost mimicking the way Alana had, his lips slightly pursed before he looked back at her, “I’m such a great conversationalist.” Will said with a shrug as he played at Alana’s reason. Toying with her answer while he waited to see if she would buckle and tell him the real reason for her stopping by or if he had to question it out of her. Poking holes in her statement. By the way Alana sagged slightly and how her lips pulled into a smile that basically screamed how she realized she was caught in the small fib.

“Alright,” Alana breathed out with a slight shake of her head, “I came down here to see how you and Miranda were doing. You know after that whole.”

“Being accused of being the Black Widow.”

“Yes that,” Alana said as her face formed into a look of soft concern as she tilted her head to the side. “So, how are you two holding up?” She asked softly. Will let out a sigh as he crossed his arms and leaned further back into his desk.

“We are doing alright I guess; I mean Miranda doesn’t really talk about it that much and I don’t want to push her into doing so.” Will let out another huff of air as he turned to look at the seats on his left. “We’ve been doing nothing, but phone calls and texts. I haven’t exactly seen her since it all happened.”

“Will, it’s been two weeks.” Alana quickly pointed out with an air of surprise surrounding her words. Will nodded with a face of acknowledgment.

“Yeah, she wanted some time to herself,” He said as he scratched the back of his head, “and I’m giving it to her.” Will quickly justified as he looked more at Alana’s black flats instead of her tender gaze. “It’s just been, I’ve been finding it difficult to maintain that request as of late.” His eyes finally looked up at her, “I’ve been missing her.” Alana tilted her head some more as a fond smile formed on her face. It was the kind of expression Will realized someone would make when they noticed a puppy in need of attention.

“And have you told her this?”

“I want to, but I also don’t want to push her.” Will tried to explain, but the more his words came out the more Alana continued to look at him with that fond expression. Will nearly expected to hear her coo at him. But instead she smiled at him and let out a breath taking in his explanation and working out a way to help him.

“Well, maybe you should tell her, who knows maybe she misses you just as much and doesn’t know how to tell you.” Will slightly shook his head.

“Miranda’s not like that, she’d tell me when she’s ready.”

“I know that Will,” Alana slowly spoke as she began to walk closer to him, “but sometimes it’s all right to push a little. Communication is key to a healthy relationship; it wouldn’t hurt to bring up how you are feeling.” Will let out a sigh through his nose and slowly nodded his head, understanding what Alana was telling him. Will found himself in almost the same boat with Miranda that they were in when she left for California. Ignoring the elephant in the room and focusing on anything other than what was really bothering him. Hoping that living in some mirrored state of denial might be the best outcome for them rather than dealing with the issue. But then again, the way they acted during their first time apart with the misunderstanding acting as an invisible barrier they actively chose to ignore, in order to carry on like everything was normal really seemed to hold them back. Now he was facing a situation that was similar and waiting for the saying hindsight is fifty-fifty to kick in, but at the moment it was not. He still found himself wanting to ignore the issue in order to keep the waters calm.

Will let out a breath as he reached over to his phone and simply stared down at the screen which still displayed Miranda’s icon photo, it was a nice photo he had taken during their second month together. The date was a simple evening walk through one of the less busy parks that could be found during a drive between his home and her work. They were on their second lap around the tree filled park, hand in hand when Miranda guided him over to the reasonable sized lake that sat in the center with a blue fence set up around it to keep people from going into the lake. Even though the fence came up to the average adult’s midsection, it would be easy for anyone to simply hope over the metal barrier. Making the fence almost pointless when thought about, but whatever made it easy for the city to sleep at night and keep the lawsuits down to a minimum.

“Isn’t this nice.” Miranda said as she walked over and slowly began to lean on the fence’s railing and taking in the sight. Of the setting sun reflecting off of the water that would softly ripple thanks to the gentle breeze, that made the cool colors that were gifted from the sun, dance. The way the deep oranges and reds that slowly bled into cool purples and blues of the slow emerging night sky, reflect on the surface of the water, and then was shined onto Miranda, painting her features in its natural glow. Will found himself looking more at Miranda than at the view, the way she leaned onto the rail, her eyes closed as she took in the cool breeze coming off of the water that gathered her hair and moved it back. She had looked so at ease in the moment Will couldn’t help, but not take his eye off of her. Miranda slowly opened her eyes and looked over at him with a sly smile. “What are you looking at?” She asked with a light playful chuckle as she turned her body slightly so she was facing him.

“Nothing,” Will turned to the lake sliding one of his hands in his pockets, “just the water.” He answered as he motioned over to the large body of water. Watching as a few ducks descended onto the lake, causing an even ripple to tail behind them.

Miranda let out a hum, “Sure you were.” She said as went back to her previous position and Will had once again found himself sharing glances between the natural sight and Miranda.

“You know if you take a picture, it will last longer.” She chuckled as she glanced over at him

“Alright.” Will said with a smirk as he pulled out his phone and started to point it towards her, who’s playful smile turned into a soft look of disbelief as she let out a laugh to match it.

“I meant the water.” She laughed as she went to change her position as she made an attempt to be bashful at the idea, as if she actually ment what she said.

“Sure you did.” Will smirked as he continued to point his phone at her and Miranda let out a sigh, her smile still painted on her face as she shook her head. Knowing she had been caught in a weak lie.

“You got me there,” She smiled with a playful roll of her eyes, “so how do you want me?” Miranda asked as she leaned back against the railing. Her arms crossed on the bar as she leaned forward slightly, her head turned towards him and her smile softening into something more delicate, something more natural.

“Just how you are is fine.” Will replied with a smile, before he took the photo.

“So, what are you going to do with that photo?” Miranda asked as she leaned over to see the picture, he had taken of her, before her eyes looked up at him.

Will let out a hum and he lightly shrugged his shoulders. “Don’t really know, maybe I’ll set it as your icon photo.” He said as he looked over at her with a small warm smile, which Miranda returned before she let out a playful chuckle then wrapped her arms round his shoulders and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

In revenge for the prompt to photo shoot, Miranda had also taken her own picture of Will. But instead of it being a posed photo with the light of the setting sun and the background of trees paired with the calm water. Miranda wanted something playful almost silly. She had chosen the moment after Will had just taken his first sip of his latté, she had purchased him from a vender; even though he insisted that he could buy them a drink to help fight off the chill in the air. He was in the middle of subconsciously licking his upper lip getting rid of the residue when she had quickly taken his photo. Taking him by surprise by the sudden snapshot. When he asked her what was that was all about, Miranda only giggled looking down at her phone, before showing him her screen. That was when he was greeted by a photo of himself with the tip of his tongue peeking out between his lips and his eyes focusing on something in the distance.

“And what do you plan on doing with that photo?” Will asked as he took a sip of his latté. Miranda shrugged and let out a hum, almost mirroring his response from earlier. But in a more playful manner than he had.

“I don’t know,” She answered in a sing song tone as she looked up from her phone and her smile grew. “Maybe I’ll set it as your icon photo.” She giggled and Will simply rolled his eyes and shook his head as a reply. Before he wrapped his arm around her shoulders and pressed a light kiss to her cheek.

Now her photo stared up at him as the memory slowly faded out of his mind. Bringing that ache to see her cut even deeper into him.

“Maybe you’re right,” Will said as he clicked his phone off and looked up at Alana, who stood waiting for Will’s response. “I should tell her tonight when she calls. Hell I could take the initiative and invite her out for dinner or something.” Alana smiled at the idea.

“That sounds like a good idea. Sometimes it’s okay to take the initiative now and again. It can make things easier, when a plan has already been thought out ahead of time that way no one is wondering in an endless circle of not knowing what to do.” Alana said as she walked over to him and began to lean on the desk next to him. “Now what exactly do you have in mind for that possible dinner date?”

Will stood by his front porch keeping an eye on his dogs as they finished their after-dinner roam when his phone started to ring, he glanced down at his watch and an amused smile formed on his face. “Right on time.” He said as he pulled out his cellphone from his back pocket and was greeted by Miranda’s icon photo. Will glanced up to check on his dogs, to see what they were in the midst of doing. Some were by the tree that sat in the middle of his front yard wondering around it a few times. Sniffing heavily at every space of the tree as if they hadn’t done that an hour before. While others simply roamed around the house. Will gave one last look at the six roaming dogs; knowing that he would find Winston sitting on the porch waiting for him to return, before he answered his phone. “Hello darlin’.” Will answered as he turned around and began to make his way to his porch.

“Hello sweetheart.” Came Miranda’s smooth voice on the other end. “How was your day, you know after finally finishing setting up that pesky test that you were so keen on putting off?” Miranda lightly teased.

“Very funny,” Will rolled his eyes as he reached out and ruffled the top of Winston’s head before he took a seat on the top step of his front porch. “But yes, I did finish the “pesky test” as you so eloquently put it. It’ll be ready by Monday, gives the class the weekend to study up and what not.” Will said as his eyes lazily roamed around the front yard, watching as Buster tried to tackle Orion and fail in the task and then turn to see if he could accomplish the same thing with Zoe; a member the pack similar to his size and Will fondly shook his head when Buster still failed. “So, how was the rest of your day?” Will asked as he leaned forward against his bent knees.

“Oh, I wish I could say same old same old. But after the whole Brittney being the Black Widow fiasco. It’s been nothing but crazy on my end, luckily my PR team is one in a million.” Miranda let out a soft sigh. “Don’t know what I’d do without them, here I thought it would just be a small spark easy to put out before it spread too far. But nope it has been a wild fire, it kept spreading and spreading, to the point I was afraid that Scarlet Swan Fashion might actually face the threat of being taken down in the blaze.” Will easily picked up the dispirited tone in her voice and it had him ache to be on the other end with her. To simply hold her hand and comfort her the best he could, the tiredness that leaked through the speaker pulled at him even more. Will was familiar with that tone, but most of the time that tone was something he would make when he spoke and hearing it come from Miranda didn’t sit right with him. It felt like a solid weight that filled out his body and made it hard for him to move.

If he closed his eyes, he could still remember the sound of the news anchor's well-tuned voice that held the right level of concern that it could come off as genuine. If only she didn't change her expression so fast when they moved to the next story. But he recalled the words she spoke in that perfectly performed voice.

"After months of no leads the FBI has finally made an arrest on the infamous Black Widow, the very woman who had slain not one, but four wealthy well respect men and her identity was revealed to be one twenty-four-year-old Brittney Wilts. Who is currently facing charges for taking the lives of Lloyd Banks, Eric Salazar, Benidict Moore and the most recent death, that of Gavin Kramer. Who were all found in their own motel rooms with their throats cut and bodies horribly mutilated. The reason behind these deaths was revealed to be due to an unhealthy infatuation with her boss Miranda Rhettford the well-renowned owner of Scarlet Swan Fashion. The weapon she used during these fear inducing months was said to be a pair of scissors. Now we still do not know what the trial will hold for her, but I believe we will all sleep better knowing that her reign of terror has finally come to an end."

Will took a deep breath, breathing in the cool air and taking in the scent that came with the outdoors. As the woman's voice faded from memory and replaced with the sound of his dogs and whatever nature provided him to hear for the time being as he came back into the present and went back to focus on who was on the other end of the phone call.

"How's everything now?" He asked, ready to move forward with this conversation and he shifted on the step kicking one of his legs out slightly so it rested on the step below it while he waited for Miranda's response.

"Everything is better now, thankfully. But honestly it was just so hectic to go through," Miranda let out an emotional chuckle, that was built on the feeling of doubt. "And here I thought it was tough when I simply had that girl suspended, who knew it could have actually gotten worse." The broken disbelief in Miranda's voice felt like nails slowly digging into Will's flesh, pressing down with every word she spoke. Not hard enough to break his skin, but cause the right amount of discomfort for him that it had him reaching up and rub at his arm. As if the nails were actually physically attacking him, at some point Will expected to look down at his arm and he would see indents.

"It's hard to extinguish a blaze that you didn't even perceive as large until you face it head on and feel the heat lick off the building flame," Winston stood up and made his way over to sit next to Will and Will didn't hesitate to reach over and run his fingers through the dog's bridle fur. "The ash and debris that is left behind can be just as difficult to handle." Will replied, feeling Winston shift to lay down against him. The dog's natural warmth seeping into his side and Will's hand trailed over the dog's body until it rested on the side of Winston, where he felt his hand rise and fall with each content breath. "I know it's been a hard couple of weeks for you." Will let out a breath and ran a hand through his hair. "All this chaos with the case and I know you want your time to deal with all of this." Will glanced down at Winston, who had his eyes closed lost in the affection being given to him. "But I was thinking we should get together and go out for dinner."

Miranda let out a hum. "That does sound nice I mean we haven't exactly seen one another for two whole weeks and texting and phone calls can only do so much. I'm not going to lie I

have been missing you a lot recently." Miranda breathed out with a soft chuckle. "And it would be nice to simply put all this behind me for a night, forget about the havoc and let my hair down. It would also be nice to see you sitting across a table again." Miranda added with the right drop of flirtation in her words that had the blossom in Will's chest slowly begin to unwind its closed petals.

"That's what I was thinking just a night where it's just the two of us. No talk about work or the case. Only us." Will added as he leaned forward placing one arm on his bent knee. Waiting for Miranda's response, he didn't understand why there was an anxious pool slowly filling in his stomach. Or why he was suddenly so aware of the open night air. While he sat down on his porch waiting for Miranda's response, he could easily pick up the soft bristling of the tree leaves getting caught in the fall's cool wind and the sound of the grass giving under every paw step. He was so aware of every soft sound there was that it started to pick at his nerves in an uneven manner. Will turned his attention up at the night sky, wondering what constellations he could identify while trying to ignore the picking. He always found some sort of soft comfort when he stared up at the night sky and seen those bright balls of light shining back at him. They were a constant in his life, whenever he felt like things were slipping out of his hinds; which seemed to be happening a lot since he agreed to go back to the field, he would find himself looking up at the night sky. Because he knew that unlike the world around him those constellations would always be up there no matter where he was, they'd be there to shine and twinkle for his searching eyes.

"That does sound nice," Miranda spoke catching Will's attention and reverting it back to her. "A night where the focus is only you and me." Her words were soft and full of consideration. "Would Sunday night work for you?" Will quickly sat up, accidently disturbing Winston and Will gave him an apologetic look and gently scratched the dog behind his ears; lulling Winston back to his original state.

"Yeah, Sunday works for me." Will answered with a warm smile. "Listen I don't want you to worry about anything. I'll be taking care of everything." Will added as he leaned forward again to wait for Miranda's response.

"Oh really, now that makes it sound so intriguing," Miranda replied, Will could hear the curious smile forming on her face and hear the shift of fabric, indicating she also had sat forward. "Do I at least get a hint on what our date night entails?" Miranda asked with a subtle wave of flirtation entwin with her already curious tone.

Will let out a chuckle and turned his attention back to the night sky, where the stars twinkled for him once again. "Alright you get one hint," He replied with a slight playful tone. "The restaurant I am taking you is named after a flower."

Strelitzia's atmosphere was quite calm for a Sunday night, Will had expected it to be just as bustling as the first time he had taken Miranda there. But instead it was more relaxed to the point Will could actually pick up the soft music the filtered through the restaurant and if he tried, he could make out a conversation or two. Instead of hearing an amalgamation of different voices that did not clash well with others, that morphed with different topics that faced the same issue. Making the place seem like a broken beehive, but then again at least a beehive had a consistent sound.

“This is lovely,” Miranda spoke before she took a sip of her wine, taking a small moment to savor the Barolo that Will had ordered. Though a part of him had hesitated to change the wine pairing, he had thought on ordering the Zinfandel like Miranda had when they had their first date. But he put that odd feeling aside and decided to change things up slightly. To introduce something slightly new to a night ment to be built on rekindling. “And I still can’t believe you managed to reserve our old table.” Miranda added and Will caught the slight twinkle in her eye with the sly smiled she had while she set down her wine glass. Will gave a one shoulder nonchalant shrug as he picked up his glass and took a sip of the deep red wine. Enjoying the slight bite of the of pepper that lingered long enough to make the hint of the rich chocolate tone stand out just a bit before it was taken over by the strong cherry.

“I just thought you might enjoy something familiar.” Will answered as he set down his glass and gave Miranda warm smile. “A night built on memories that only continues to grow.”

“That was very thoughtful of you Will,” Miranda nearly cooed and her eyes slowly dropped to Will’s chest then back up at him. “Is that the same reason why you decided to wear the waistcoat I made you?” She asked with a raised eyebrow and a playful smile.

“Perhaps,” Will said with a sly smirk before he took another sip of his wine, “or maybe I just like it and wanted to wear it again. Can’t really say.” In truth the reason he had put on the waistcoat again; pairing it with a charcoal grey dress shirt that matched the branch like design. Was because he wanted to give off the indication that the night was going to be about the two of them. Where the focus was just how they were in the present and possible future. Not a single ounce of attention was going to be spent with what had been happening since the web spun from the spilt blood of the rich had been finally cleared. Even though some remnants of those sticky strands still lingered in the back of Will’s mind. Still catching his wondering thoughts and trapping his focus long enough to leave behind a residue, teasingly out of reach for him to clear away completely. There were still parts of the case that still did not sit quite right in the back of his mind, a misplaced book on the self. You wouldn’t realize that it didn’t belong among the others unless you looked at it. That was how Will sometimes found his mind working when he found himself filling out paper after paper about the supposably closed case. He felt like he had when he first viewed Brittney sitting in the interrogation room, he felt as though he was trying to get a silhouette to fit over her form with every twist and pull of his mind. But all he was granted was flickering and shuttering of an image, until he had given up and let that silhouette glitch in and out on its own accord.

But now was not the time to linger on the flickering image or the still bitter taste of doubt that not even the rich taste of the Barolo could cover. No at the moment Will wanted to stay in the present as much as possible. To keep his slightly wondering thoughts on the classy woman who sat across from in and how the small flicker from the lone candle danced in her eyes and casted a warm hue of light over her features. That was what he wanted to focus on the most and not the idea of Brittney sitting in a lone cell with her hands stained with blood of four men.

“Sure,” Miranda said as she drawn the word out in a teasing manner as she took one more sip of her wine. “But in all honesty,” Miranda continued smoothly changing the subject as she set down her glass and reached over to place her hand on top of Will’s and he was given that warm comfort he often felt every time they entwined hands. “I’m so glad you wanted to have

dinner tonight." She said with a warm soft smile. "It's nice to get away from all that," Miranda made a loose gesture with her other hand to help indicate her point. "For a while and not think about the chaos that I barely got under control." She said with a subtle shake of her head.

"That's what tonight is all about," Will spoke with a smile as he maneuvered his hand so that they were properly entwining fingers. "To put all those thoughts, all that chaos on the back burner for a while. So they don't take too much of our attention while we are in each other's company."

"Yes, I know that. But I won't lie my mind still likes to turn its attention back there. You can't really blame me for not being able to fully give up on those thoughts." Miranda said and Will felt her thumb slowly begin to rub over his thumb's knuckle, in small gently circles. It sent a sense of calmness through him that mixed with a fuzzy feeling of being genuinely happy to be in Miranda's presence. To feel her hand in his. To no longer only interact through the phone and actually have a conversation with Miranda face to face. Where he could see her eyes light up when she would talk about her interest, or how she twirled a strand of her hair around her finger when she became submerged in one of their longer conversations. All those things he could experience instead of picturing it from the other side of the phone.

"No, I don't blame you. It can be very difficult to put something like that out of your mind. I know it is for me, there are countless nights where work follows me home." Will turned his attention to the window and watched the cars and people as they went past the restaurant. Not fully focusing on anything just acknowledging the constant movements. "Like a shadow I can't escape." He added under his breath as he felt that cobweb made of blood sticking to his mind again.

"Hey now," Miranda squeezed Will's hand as she leaned forward her hair brushing the table top as she tried to regain Will's attention. "I thought I was the one that needed to be told not to focus on my job." Miranda lightly chuckled with a warm smile, while Will shook his head and turned his attention back to Miranda. No longer lost in watching the outside world pass them by, no longer stuck in a trance and slipping back down the spiral slicked with innocent blood.

"Sorry about that." He said with a weary smile as he tried to refocus his thoughts back on the present. "Guess we're both having some difficulty separating ourselves from our troubles." Will said with a weak chuckle while he rubbed the back of his neck with his free hand. Already feeling his muscles wanting to stiffen on him, just at the thought of falling back into the world of the dead.

"It's alright," Mirada said giving Will's hand a gentle squeeze before she leaned back in her seat, their hands never letting go. "I mean perhaps it was a bit of a big ask for us to ignore something," Miranda paused as if she was thinking of the next word to say. "So consuming."

"Perhaps you're right," Will breathed out, feeling his chest nearly collapse when the weight of the unavoidable subject was being lifted off of him. "It might be best for the both of us if we just talk about it." Will said, "It could probably do us both some good."

“Yes, I think it would,” Miranda said as she pulled back her hand and once again Will found himself missing that warmth that came from the simple gesture. “But not right now, right now let’s try and focus on us shall we.” She said with a smile as she once more picked up her glass to take another sip of her wine.

“Speaking of now,” Will said as he turned his body, so he could access the pocket of his jacket that hung on the chair. “I wanted this night to be special, so I got you something.” Will said as he continued to reach into his pocket.

“Oh, sweetheart you didn’t have to get me anything.” Miranda said as she set down her glass and waited to see what Will had for her.

“Nonsense, you have gotten me plenty of gifts during our time together and I believe it is time I return the gesture.” Will said as he turned back around and placed a black velvet box on the table and began to push it over to her. “That and I really wanted to.” He said in a more sincere voice with warmth filling his eyes. “Hope you like it.” He added as he watched Miranda’s face shift to that of curiosity and surprise as she reached over and picked up the box. Will watched as she opened and was immediately taken back by the gift as her eyes widened while she covered her mouth with her hand. He could feel the joy and surprise rolling off her. It felt like he had stepped outside and was greeted by the spring sun.

“Oh sweetheart I don’t know what to say,” she said as reached into the velvet box and pulled out an elegant silver charm bracelet that adored with a few rubies that shone brightly against the silver and hanging off of the center of the bracelet was a small swan. Will watched as she held the jewelry in her hand and smiled at it. “It’s beautiful, but you really shouldn’t have.” She said as she looked up at him with soft eyes and Will held up his hand to stop her from continuing.

“Like I said I wanted to, plus you are always gifting me something and I thought it was time that I did the same thing.” He said with a warm smile, hoping he could convince Miranda into keeping it. “You can think of it this way, now you and I are both going adorn something on our wrist that our significant other got us.” He said with a smile. “So do you like it?” Miranda looked down at the bracelet then back at him, her smile never changing as she placed her hand on her chest.

“Of course I do, thank you so much.” She said with sincerity as she looked down at the bracelet again. “It’s so beautiful, I can’t even remember when someone had gotten me such a gift.” She said as she unclipped the bracelet and attempted to put in on herself.

“Here let me help you put that on.” Will said as he reached over and Miranda handed him the jewelry and held out her wrist in front of him that peeked out from under the cuff of her outfit. Unlike Will who wore an outfit he was already seen in, to help play into the night of remembrance, Miranda had worn something he had never seen her wear before. It was a very stylish black jumpsuit, that had an intricate vine like design woven out of deep red into it. That started at her right leg, wrapped around her body, and ended at the flared cuff of her left wrist. The vines in her outfit paired well with the branches in Will’s, connecting them together in a way, that was accidental yet perfectly matched. Will gently pushed the cuff of the jumpsuit up revealing Miranda’s wrist and he clipped the elegant bracelet around her wrist.

“It really is beautiful, thank you so much sweetheart.” Miranda said softly as she looked down at her wrist and then back up at him, before leaning over the table to gift him with a warm appreciation filled kiss. Will felt a gently warmth travel though his body, fluttering under skin touching ever nerve point in him with a soft caress. Miranda leaned back and Will felt himself doing the same thing, yet a part him wanted to stay in that close proximity and not have a table separating them. “I truly love it, I truly do.” Miranda said as she held her wrist and looked down the bracelet with a warm smile. Before turning to look at him with a sly smile. “But you do realize that you just opened the door for me to start gift hunting for you again.” She said in a playful tone, which Will rolled his eyes at and shook his head before picking up his glass to take another sip.

Miranda’s house greeted them with a soft heat as they entered, chasing away any late-night almost winter chill that still clung to their bones when they entered. “That dinner was,” Miranda began to say as she walked inside, only stopping in the center of the foyer and began to slid off her burgundy peacoat.

“Let me guess, lovely?” Will cocked an eyebrow as he took the coat from Miranda so he could hang it on the coat rack for her. Before he slid off his own suite jacket and did the same thing.

Miranda let out a chuckle “I guess I do tend to use that word quite a lot don’t I.” Miranda said with another laugh as she adjusted the red velvet belt on her jumpsuit. Before she turned her attention to Will, who had just finished hanging both their coats on the rack.

“Yes, you tend to use that word often,” Will said as slowly walked over to her, “but that’s a trait of yourself that I really enjoy.” Will said as he placed his hands on both her shoulder and leaned forward and gave Miranda a kiss. Which she did not hesitate to reciprocate, be placing her hand gently on the side of his face while her other arm draped loosely over his other shoulder. Will’s hands slid from her shoulders and rested on her hips. Pulling her closer to himself until their bodies pressed against one another’s. They stood in the entrance hall sharing another tender kiss, that sent a mellow warmth that connected them to each other. As a soft flicker of delicate pleasure fluttered under their skin and their heartbeats lightly thumped in a rhythmic way, playing out to each other. While lips pressed gently against lips, heads tilting to opposite directions. The kiss was built on longing to be in each other’s company after weeks of being apart with only far conversations that held them together like a thinly pulled string. Something also lingered beneath the kiss, that teased to be born if they continued to share the embrace, if just one of them pulled slightly closer, if one opened for the other. Then that kiss of soft longing would open the door that led to another night upstairs, spent with limbs tangled together and bodies connecting. As they reconnected all over again for that night in blood pumping pleasure.

Miranda slowly pulled away from the kiss. “Now why couldn’t you greet me like that when you came to pick me up?” She lightly teased with a smirk and a soft raise of her eyebrow. Her hands slowly slid from where they were, sensually down his shoulders and resting on his chest. All while she stayed in his own hold.

“Because then we would have missed our reservation.” Will replied with a cocky grin as he removed one of his hands that sat lightly on Miranda’s hip to gently guided a strand of her

hair behind her ear. Lightly brushing the tip of his fingers over her warm skin as he did so. Catching the slight rise of goosebumps as his fingers passed over her temple.

Miranda let out a soft hum. “You have a very,” Miranda leaned forward and placed a soft kiss to Will’s lips, “very,” another soft kiss, “good point.” She finished before she gave him one more slightly longer kiss that teased at opening that door that hung ajar. Beckoning the two to grab its knob and open it up and walk through it. But she had pulled away before either one of them could take hold of the door knob. “And I want to thank you again for the bracelet.” Miranda said as she gazed into Will’s eyes and he felt himself greeting lost in their warmth.

“I’m glade you like it.” Will said as he leaned forward and placed his own soft kiss on her lips, before pulling away.

“Not just like, but love it, I don’t think there will be a day that goes by that I won’t be wearing it,” Miranda said with a warm smile, “now if you’ll excuse me,” Miranda said as she stepped out of Will’s light hold, “why don’t I go pour us some drinks and we can retire to the living room.” Miranda said as she gestured with her head towards the living room.

“Mind if I join you?” Will asked, not really wanting to go and wait in Miranda’s living room for the umpteenth time. Plus another part of him wasn’t quite ready to leave her inviting present that called to him in a lulling melody. Miranda looked at him in soft amusement, before a light chuckle came from her mouth.

“If you really want to, all I am doing is going into the kitchen and that’s all.” She said as she began to walk to the kitchen.

“That’s alright, perhaps I can be of some assistance.” Will said as he began following her. He couldn’t help the bit of pride that filled him when he heard Miranda let out a little giggle.

“If you insist maybe I’ll have you get the glasses.” She playfully replied as they walked into the kitchen and pointed to one of the higher cabinets while she continued to walk over to another door that was further back into the kitchen. While Will waked over to the cabinet that she had pointed towards. “Don’t mind me, I’ll just go grab us a bottle,” she said while she opened the door, before stopping and looking over towards Will. “Unless you want to join me in there as well.” She lightly teased.

“No I am perfectly fine waiting for you here.” Will said with a light shrug before Miranda disappeared into her liquor cabinet. A part of himself was a little curious to see what other drinks she might own or what the cabinet itself looked like. He once caught a quick glance of the one Hannibal had, when the man excused himself to go retrieve a bottle that he was going to gift to someone that Will could not recall the name of. That was when he caught just a quick glance of the space, though it was a bit dark thanks to the low lighting and choice of dark interior. But Will did remember feeling slightly impressed by what number of bottles he did catch. It had him wondering if Miranda too own just as large number of bottles in her own cabinet, something told him that she might have a few. He also couldn’t help, but question what could possibly be the most exotic drink; ones that most people never heard of or could pronounce the name of, she had nestled amongst those bottles and what was the most mondain, something he might cross paths with.

Turning his attention away from where Miranda had gone, Will turned to the cabinets, and opened one. Where he was met with several crystal tumblers and picked out two of them. He held the glasses in his hands admiring how they shined under the cool kitchen light before he walked over to kitchen island and set the tumblers down. That was when his eyes caught a few laminated rectangles all over lapping each other and he noticed they all had some common ground of advertising traveling. Will walked over to the pile of travel pamphlets taking in the cheesy name of the travel agency going by Friendly Flights that had a cartoon air plane adorning a smile winking at the camera while it flew around the world. Will opened the pamphlet and took in the information that laid behind its glossy pages. All places to stop and see while exploring the beautiful city that was London. That small grasp of curiosity gripped Will hard as he set down the pamphlet and picked up another one and was greeted with the near identical set of information.

“Since we seem to be having a walk down memory lane, I thought I’d get bring out the Glenmorangie Signet.” Miranda spoke with a light tone and Will turned over slightly to watch her walk back into the room cradling the bottle in her hands. Miranda stopped and peered around Will, to see what he had in his hand. “Oh, I see you found my travel pamphlets.”

“Oh yeah they were just laying here on the counter.” Will spoke as he set down the pamphlet to join the rest in the pile. For some odd reason he felt like a kid who was just caught with their hand in the cookie jar and he had no idea why. It wasn’t like he was snooping around, digging through Miranda’s mail or anything like that. Yet he had this urge to apologize any ways. Which didn’t really sit right for him. “So, you planning one going to London sometime soon?” Will asked.

Miranda let out a light sigh, “I was going to tell you about that.” She began to walk around the island, her eyes on the pamphlets and she set the bottle down, before her eyes looked up at him. “Sorry that you had to find out this way. But it’s been in motion for quite a while now, before we met actually,” Miranda began to explain as she picked up the two tumblers and went to her freezer to collect the ice. “And in all honestly with this whole Brittney fiasco and the chaos that followed I nearly forgot about the trip all together until Nichole mentioned it to me.” Miranda said with a soft fond smile as she walked back over to the island and set the two glasses down.

“So is the trip business or pleasure?” Will asked as he picked up another pamphlet, one that was more subtle in its design.

“Sadly business.” Miranda answered with a sigh as she began to pour the Glenmorangie Signet and Will watched as the dark liquid easily took over the pure clear ice, tainting its natural state and engulfing it in its darkness. “It seems I simply can’t get away from work.” Miranda added as she moved onto the second glass.

“When do you plan on taking off?” Will asked, though his head was angled to watch Miranda pour his eyes were looking up at her. While he set down the pamphlet, no longer interested in what it had to offer, more focused on this trip Miranda was taking out of the U.S.

“Oh it’s hard to say,” Miranda said in an almost nonchalant way as she pulled the bottle back when the liquid hit the midway point of the tumbler glass. “Sometime in the next couple of

weeks that's for sure, but once again because of the whole Brittney issue everything that was in motion is now on shaky grounds." She added as she picked up one of the glasses and offered it to Will. "I hope you don't mind me not telling you sooner." She added with a touch of concern in her voice that shifted her ton a bit as Will took the glass. Will's eyes were caught for a second by the way the dark whiskey stirred in the crystal tumbler. Clinging to the sides as it lightly splashed against the walls before settling down in a calm state of ink.

"I'm not upset at all," Will said as he directed his focus back to Miranda, "I mean with all that has been happening I'm not all that surprised to hear that the trip escaped your mind." Will said and he watched as Miranda relaxed a little at his statement and an easy smile painted her face.

"Thanks for being understanding," Miranda said as she picked up own glass and held it between both of her hands. "With all this, I mean." She added as she gestured openly with her hand before returning it back to holding her glass.

Will simply bowed his head slightly as a response, before he decided to continue the conversation. "So, how long will you be gone for this trip?" He asked as he turned his attention back to untouched drink, slowly swirling the glass. Catching small teasing whiffs of the rich drink, the hardy oak that spoke well with the ginger and held together with the familiar scent of espresso. It had him recalling the taste and for a second Will actually believed he had taken a drink without realizing it.

"For a while actually, maybe the for a whole month," Will noticed how Miranda also turned her attention to her own glass. "It's honestly hard to tell at this point, it could be like California and I might come back early or it might be the complete opposite and I have to stay longer." Her attention traveled up to Will. Before she let out a deep sigh and shifted in her stance, this caught Will off guard he thought the conversation might be ending and it looked like Miranda had more to get off her chest. "I know the whole distance thing with California was a bit tricky and then here we were two weeks with nothing, but texts and calls." She took another sigh, her eyes going back to her drink. "We seem to be acting like it's been months instead of weeks at the moment and now I just told you I'll be taking off in a few weeks across the ocean to another country for a month maybe more."

"But maybe less." Will added once again fitting the role of optimist, a role that felt achingly stiff for him from lack of use. "Besides when it came to the California distance, we were dealing with the heavy weight of the whole Hannibal misunderstanding and with these past two weeks we were recovering from the Brittney and the Black Widow misfortune." Will continued feeling the pull to go deeper into his sudden view of optimism and point out why those two last acts of long distance felt the way they did.

"You have a point there," Miranda said her eyes leaving her glass to look at Will, "But, I'll be gone far longer than that and let's face it. We seem to fool ourselves into believing that simple texts and calls can help battle off our desire to be together."

"Yes, it does seem we have a hard time sustaining ourselves with phone calls and texts," Will mused over as he once again began to swirl his glass. "We can always try videocall instead, if it gets too isolating for us." Will supplied, though he rarely used videocall. The number of times he actually sat in front of his laptop with the camera on he could count on one hand. All

those times were mostly for lectures and the one time it was with Beverly who didn't want to walk all the way from Will's office to Jack's and convinced him to just let her use his laptop. He didn't really need to be on the screen, but she was too quick to pull up the videocall for him to get out of view. With that small offering of a solution Will watched as Miranda took in the idea and lit up on the spot.

"Of course, videocall," She lightly chuckled and shook her head with a soft smile while she looked down at her glass and copied Will's action of swirling it. "I don't know why I didn't think of that." She added before looking up at Will. "Perhaps my mind has just been to clouded by the debris of that storm that Brittney brought on that even the simplest solution never even crossed my mind."

"A clouded mind can leave to blind eyes." Will simply stated, while he felt a heavy lull slowly pressing down around them as the conversation started to approach the end. Leaving the two to stand in the kitchen with untouched drinks in their hands, neither one making a move to take a drink just yet.

"Well," Miranda's voice cut through the approaching lull with the ease of a newly sharped knife and drawing Will's attention back to her. "I believe this night should be continued back in the living room." She offered as she walked around the island and towards the doorway before looking over her shoulder. "And I do hope you join me." She said with a coy smile and a soft wink before disappearing around the corner. Will smiled softly to himself with a light shake of his head before following after Miranda.

When he entered the living room, he was greeted with Miranda already sitting on her couch with the fire place holding a flame for them to sit in front of. Holding her attention as he continued to walk into the room and only did the flames lose her attention when he walked around the couch, where her eyes went to him and watched as he took a seat next to her. Miranda didn't even hesitate to slide closer to him, softly pressing herself against him as her arm wrapped around him giving her the leverage to pull herself closer. Her head nestling onto his shoulder as she adjuster herself to fit perfectly next to him, before she turned her head up to look at him. "I'm glad you could join me." She teased in a sensual voice as she leaned up and placed a delicate kiss on his cheek.

"There's no place I would rather be." Will replied as he turned his head and captured her lips with his. Will slowly switched his glass to his other hand to free his hand so he could reach over and place it on the side of Miranda's face and he felt Miranda shift once more in order to face him more properly as she mirrored his actions, placing her hand on the side of his face. Bringing themselves closer in their connection as Miranda's body pressed against his and Will felt himself trying to twist himself so he could face more of her as their kiss began to grow in a lust starving hunger. That was slowly building inside of him like a small flame that needed more kindling, but still held promise to expand and grow the more it was fed. They slowly opened for another once again as they pushed to be closer and closer, soft lips easily locking with one another as their tongues slowly slid next to each other. Mapping out the other's mouth with a need for more while hands softly caressed the others face, helping guide each other into what should happen next. Will felt his heartbeat build up as Miranda lightly teased his bottom lip with a soft suck and her hand slowly traveled passed his face and became lost in his still tamed curls. His own hand lightly slid down and his finger tips

brushed against her neck, where he felt her own rising heartbeat. Before he continued to slide his hand further down, past her chest and resting on her hip where he lightly squeezed the supple flesh.

Miranda slowly pulled back breaking the kiss that dared to stay locked. “I think we need to change our sitting positions.” She spoke in a low lust filled voice, before she stood up and took the tumbler out of Will’s loosened grip and he watched as she placed them on the floor on the other end of the couch. Miranda sauntered back over to Will and he watched with wondering eyes as she stood in front of him with a sly smile on her lips. Before he could ask her, what was running through her mind, Miranda slid herself onto his lap. Setting her weight on top his thighs as she pressed herself close to him, straddling him and he felt a small electric pulse of pleasure race over his nerves as Miranda settled herself on him. “I believe this position is far more,” Miranda slowly spoke as she leaned forward her hands sliding over Will’s shoulder as she leaned over to his ear. “*Pleasurable.*” She whispered and Will felt another jolt of electric pleasure course through him as Miranda placed a few long soft kisses against his cheek and with each press of her warm lips against him Will felt another wave wash over him.

Will’s hands reached out and took both sides of Miranda’s waist as he felt her slowly trail down the side of his face and make her way to the side of his neck, a trail of light tingles left in her lip’s wake. One of her hands slowly slid down his shoulder to his chest and he felt as her fingers began to slid into his waistcoat and work their way into his shirt. Where they began lightly caress his bare skin sending even more rushes of hot electrified pulses through his body. One of Will’s hands left where they rested caressing Miranda’s waist and began to follow the curves of her side, fingers caressing her soft flesh as they snaked up her side before the reached around her back. Where he gently took a hold of the back of neck that laid under the waves of neatly brushed hair Will slowly began to caress her neck feeling the skin under his fingertips and the bumps of her spin in his palm, the way the muscles of her neck flexed with each kiss she gave him, all while he leaned forward and returned Miranda’s own neck kisses with his. As he mouthed at the hot flesh of the side of her neck, making sure no space was left untouched by his claiming lip. With every soft opened mouth kiss Miranda laid on his neck Will returned the action with his own. While one of Miranda’s hands mapped out his chest, he nails lightly teasing the skin, Will’s hand; the one that still rested on her waist, would begin to kneed the near tender flesh.

“I’m starting to think,” Miranda spoke between her act of decorating Will’s neck with her lipstick, “we won’t be able to survive our next separation.” She breathed as she moved from kissing his neck to his jawline. Her other hand running through his once neatly tamed hair, her nails scrapping his scalp as she continued to kiss his jaw.

“We can,” Will breathed out before he continued to kiss along Miranda’s neck, getting lost in how warm her skin was and how hard her pulse felt under his lips. “We will.” He added as his hand that held the back of Miranda’s neck began to run through her hair, getting tangled in its dark thick waves. All while he felt electric tingle after electric tingle course through him. Which was starting to turn in a dripping pool of heat that was feeding that building fire and awakening his need to have more of her.

“You sound so certain.” Miranda breathed out as she slowly eased her kissing along with her hand movements and Will found himself doing the same thing as he felt another soft shift in the room. As their once burning passion for each other gently died down and this time it wasn’t due to an unwanted phone call. Will felt Miranda slowly pull away from him, so she could look at him as she still sat on his lap and he noticed the look in her eyes. The uncertainty that began to fill them as she looked at him. “How can you be so certain?” She asked.

Will looked up at her and smiled softly in a way to put her mind at ease while he ran his hand gently through her hair. “Because I just am, we seem to have a pretty good track record about being able to come back together after being far apart. This time we’ll adjust more to the situation.” He said as he tucked a strand of Miranda’s hair behind her ear. With the intent to sooth what ever battling thoughts lay in her mind that had caused the shift from lust to need of comfort.

“By video calling when we can?” Miranda playfully asked with a weak smile as she began to gently play with Will’s hair, twirling a few of his curls with her finger.

“Along with calling and texting when we can,” He said as he looked at Miranda, “and even the occasional postcard if you feel like it.” He joked trying to get a reaction out of Miranda, something stronger than that unstable smile she had managed to force her facial muscles to make, which he did when he watched her snicker lightly and shake her head.

“Of course, who could forget about postcards,” she said with a mock serous voice as she turned her attention to him. “Especially the ones that are cluttered with London’s most recognizable trademarks.” She added before breaking the façade and ended the sentence by laughing.

“I mean is there any other kind?” Will chuckled glade he could stop Miranda’s downhill spiral into the land of uncertainty, a destination he was all too familiar with. Miranda continued to stare down at him with a warm smile as she pulled her hand away from his chest and placed on the side of his face. Where her thumb gently caressed his cheek sending a soft warmth through him as she continued to look at him with the same warmth. As Will felt the mood in the room continue to shift into something more docile, that laid between them like a slumbering cat as they shared a new moment that was in complete contrast to the near roaring fire that they were building between them a few moments ago. “And you’ll have this,” Will took Miranda’s wrist of the hand that wanted to continue to play with his hair and held it so they both could see the way the bracelet caught the fires light in its silver shine. “To help fight off the loneliness that might creep by when we cannot reach each other.” He said as he placed a soft kiss to Miranda’s inner wrist right over her pulse that was slowing down, before pulling away to look back at her with his own soft small smile.

“You’re right about that,” Miranda said as she took her wrist back and studied the bracelet for a few moments, “I’m already planning on the next few charms to add to it, before I have to take off,” her eyes traveled back to Will. “Perhaps a paw print, or maybe,” her hand reached out and began to play with a few of Will’s askew curls again, causing him to wonder what her fascination was with playing with his hair, before his attention was brought back to her. “A magnifying glass, things to help remind me of you while we are apart.” She said with a soft

smile as she continued to gently run her hand through his hair and Will simply looked up and watched as her expression began to fall slightly. “You know, I am really going to miss you while I’m away.” Miranda spoke her voice sounded soft near delicate as she continued to play with his hair and Will could see a sense of sorrow build behind her eyes.

“And I’m going to miss you as well.” Will replied as watched as Miranda played with his hair. Feeling as her fingers softly messed with his curls, her eyes focused on the task as if she couldn’t admit her feelings while looking directly at him.

“You know I didn’t even think this whole business trip was going to happen in the first place,” Miranda mused still lost in her act, “I mean I was sure the company was going to call me up at any moment and call the whole thing off.” Will watched as Miranda slowly started to show signs of falling back into the world of uncertainty and enter the land of hard doubt. “All thanks to that pesky little Brittney.” Miranda’s words came out through clenched teeth and Will noticed a glance of frustration pass through her features and he could tell she was holding herself back.

“But they haven’t and it sounds to me that things are still in motion.” Will spoke as he took the hand that caressed his cheek and laid a light kiss on the back of it and he could feel that ready to be born frustration that boiled inside of Miranda slowly fade away. As she took her attention off of playing this his hair and returned them back to him, where he seen that warmth return to them.

“Perhaps you’re right and I am just having a hard time letting the whole Brittney being the Black Widow thing go.” Miranda sighed as her attention went back to playing with Will’s hair.

“I don’t blame you for not being able to let it go so easily,” Will said as he continued to look up at Miranda, “in fact the case though it is closed, still haunts my mind. I feel it lingering in the back ground like a pesky cobweb.” Will confessed as he let go of Miranda’s hand and went back to holding both sides of her hips, while Miranda’s newly freed hand went to rest on his shoulder.

“You know it got so bad for a while that I couldn’t even pick up a pair of fabric scissors,” Miranda let out a light chuckle. “I mean after what she did to those men with such a tool, I just couldn’t bring myself to handle them. Let alone look at them.”

Will’s eyes left Miranda as he felt his mind slowly begin to fall back into itself. Taking in Miranda’s words as it ran it though a filter. “You couldn’t pick up a pair of fabric scissors?” Will repeated and the question tasted stale on his tongue as he felt his mind getting trapped in the remains of the cobweb. Sticking to his thoughts and showing signs of not letting go anytime soon. As they drew him further back to the case that he wanted so desperately to be closed.

“Sadly no, every time I reached for a pair or seen Nichole handling some, I found myself turning away.” Miranda said as she continued to play with his hair. “I know it sounds ridiculous now that I am saying it out loud,” Miranda lightly laughed, “but could you really blame me?” She asked tilting her head slightly to the side as she turned her attention to look at Will. Who found himself finding it hard to focus on her words at the moment as he fought

to keep his thoughts in the present. He couldn't quite understand why hearing Miranda talk about her difficulty dealing with a pair of fabric scissors was sending him back towards that cobweb.

"Oh, no I don't blame you." Will quickly spoke trying to appear that he was still there with her. "I sometimes get the same way. I once found it difficult to pick up one of my own kitchen knives after working on a case for a month." Will said trying to fight his mind free from the sticky cobweb that still clung to him like a starved leech, praying off of any attention he would throw its way and at the moment he really did not want to keep feeding it. Will licked his lips before he continued to speak. "Do you mind if I go use your rest room, I think that bottle of Barolo we shared has finally caught up with me." He said with a weak chuckle and a nervous smile as a sudden wave of claustrophobia set in and he felt like he could no longer breath properly. Miranda looked down at him for a few seconds, her eyes roaming over his face, trying to pick apart the facial expression he was giving her. An expression that felt held together with off brand glue and a quick spoken prayer, before a smile crossed her face.

"Oh of course," Miranda said as she steadily got off his lap and watched as Will got to his feet. "There is a guest bathroom just up the stairs first door to your right." Miranda said as she pointed towards the directions of the stairs. "And if you are having trouble finding it, then," She walked closer to him and began to run the back of her finger over his jawline. "Well you know where the master bathroom is." She said in a sultry tone as she leaned close and kissed him on the cheek. Will couldn't help the shiver that trailed down his spine as he recalled the memory that Miranda painted so easily, but it wasn't enough to free his mind from the sticky cobweb.

"Yes, I believe I know." Will said with a slight chuckle as he ducked his head, before excusing himself again and walking off to the bathroom that Miranda had pointed out for him.

The cold water felt somewhat refreshing when Will splashed it onto his skin, which felt as though it had a layer of new lit coals underneath it. Burning from the inside out while his mind tried its hardest to start a free fall backwards into the embrace of the web; which no longer felt like a pesky cobweb. But more of what the Black Widow had spun at the beginning of the case, the same web that had caught the team in the first place as soon as they stepped foot into Eric Salazar's motel room.

He could feel a dull thumping pain wanting to start in the back of his mind the more he clutched onto his thinking. Keeping it from falling completing backwards, but the more he clutched the more the thumping pain grew as though his own mind was fighting against his grasp. As if it wanted to go through with the free fall and become tangled in the web that was supposed to be cleared weeks ago and he was being too stubborn to let it.

Will took a deep breath as he leaned over the sink and gripped its ceramic sides until his knuckles threatened to turn white, feeling as his chest slowly expanded with ever deep breath. Muscles moving under the skin while his lungs stretched to take in more air. He felt the cool water drip off of his face as it tried to put out the heat the boiled inside of him. All while he tried to find some peace in his cracked mind in the quiet of the bathroom, where the only

sound he could hear was his own breathing and the soft drip of the water. Will took one more breath, before he lifted his head and ran a hand over his face, gathering some of the water that still remained. Will slowly opened his aching eyes to meet his own reflection in the elegant mirror he stood in front of, taking note of his appearance. His hair was a bit of a frizzled mess from Miranda's playful fingers, his shirt and waistcoat needed to be rebuttoned; which he realized his fingers were already working on repairing, and what caught his attention the most was the trail of red lipstick that still painted the side of his neck. Will watched as his hand's reflection reached up to one of the marks left behind by Miranda's lips and pressed down on it. Creating a pressure he could feel connecting himself with actions of his reflection. Before slowly dragging it over and across his Adam's apple, making a smooth red line. *Like an unwanted scarf.*

Will quickly retracted his hand away from his throat with rapid blinking as he tried to clear his mind of the thought. He reached for the sink to gather more water to wash away the lipstick. *Stop, this Graham. Before your mind fully traps itself.* He thought with slight anger as he turned on the sink and cupped his hand for the cool water to gather in. *So, Miranda has a hard time dealing with fabric scissors after finding out Brittney used them to end four men's lives.* Will began to rub the water on his neck, not carrying if he left a red mark from how harsh he was being. *You're just being paranoid again, that's all.*

But what if you're not? Came a chilling thought that dripped with doubt as he lifted his eye to stare at his own reflection, halting his movements. Leaving his hand to press against his neck, where he could feel the heavy beat of his pulse. Will locked eyes with his own reflection as he felt that one sentence thought sink into his mind, like a stone dropped into quick sand. As he stared into his own eyes, he suddenly felt the presence of not just himself in the bathroom, but the presence of four others. All standing behind him, eyes milky white and glazed over, bodies pale and cold, and all wearing the same unwanted scarf while their lower halves wore a blanket of crimson. They all stared down at him, waiting to be acknowledged, to be seen. Will knew deep down that they weren't in the room with him, circling him, accusing him of taking their lives, but their presence felt all too real and he expected when he broke eye contact with himself that he would be met with their reflection. He waited for one of them to make a move, to reach out with their frozen touch that could no longer feel, grab him by the shoulder and spin him around. Forcing him to make eye contact with their sunken lifeless gaze and face a possible reality that he had battled so hard not to fall victim to.

Get a hold of yourself! Will bitterly thought as he squeezed his eye shut and willed away the four other beings that threated to haunt the back of his mind. Like the rest of those fallen lives he had played masqueraded for. *You are just looking at something that isn't there, letting your paranoia get the best of you.* He took a few more deep breaths as he tried to put a stop to the train of thought that dared to leave the station, but the more he fought to keep the train from moving the more he realized it was too late and that he was already taking off down the winding tracks. With its speed increasing, going faster, faster, and faster, until he no longer had any control over it in the first place. *If nothing is there, then why are you fighting it so hard, just let your mind go just this once. Let your empathy do the one thing that it's good at.*

With another breath Will felt his grip loosen on his mind as he watched the golden pendulum swing elegantly across his vison. While his mind was given the opportunity to fall

backwards, to be caught in the opened arms of his paranoia, and whisked away on that speeding train. Taking in all that still floated freely around his head that could not be caught in the case file and refused to slide into slots that it obviously did not fit into.

The web that I had meticulously woven for those who found themselves fatally stuck in, is something that took time and concentration. It is not something that I meaninglessly started out of one simple act or thought. No this web was something that took months of planning and well paid for effort, as years passed it turned into something I could look at, gaze upon, and feel nothing but a warmth of pride. As I stare at those snared in its adhesive embrace with glory. Where I look and feel nothing but satisfaction.

It was all about control, I had it over ever situation I put myself in with these men who had fallen so easily for my act. I let them believe I found their words, their mannerism charming, attractive, something that I craved when in reality just being in the same social class had me grinding my teeth. I knew I would have them wrapped around my finger the moment I laid eyes on them and heard the first words that came from their rotting mouths. Choosing them was easy, I knew what I wanted, I wanted someone arrogant, someone who thought of himself above all the rest, where all they had to do was snap their fingers and people would fall to their feet. All I had to do was feed that over engorged ego of theirs and they would come crawling back for more.

Then all I had to do was play the part of the innocent bystander as their blood pooled around my feet and the bloodhounds searched for my scent. Hidden in plain sight, out in the open where no one would believe me to be while I waited for my next victim to walk through my doors. I will simply act like the rest of the sheep that flock around me until it was time for me to shed the wool and act once more. While I wear this costume, I am invisible, I am in control. The way I need it to be, the way I want it to be, the way I had made the life I live for myself. While those men I come across were given this control, I had to work for it, fight for it. It is how I will always have it; nothing will take the control from me. I made it so that every situation I am in rather it be while I where the sheep's wool, or while I walk with them as the wolf. And I will sink my fangs in anyone beneath me in order to maintain the role I have built for myself. Because in this web that I have woven and walk on while others struggle to break free when they realize they are trapped, I know I will be able to move off of it freely. From the first body that went unnoticed to rot away turning into waste for maggots to fest on to the last where I supposable faltered. Where I let them see me as imperfect for the first and only time, and even than my imperfection was my own choice of action. Because I will always be in control.

This is my design.

Will took in a sharp breath as he was harshly pushed back into his own mind, into his own skin and he could feel his heart beating wildly in his chest. Desperate to go back to the clam state that he had it in before he let the pendulum swing. *Brittney was never the Black Widow.*

Will walked down the large stairs trying to gather his now congealed thoughts, the revelation of Brittney not being the Black Widow and the strong possibility of who might be, caused him to take the stairs in slow stiff motions. As if he could clean up his thinking before entering the living room and being in Miranda's presence again. Where the night will play

out in only one way from this point on and Will wondered if he should press play on this frozen scene or continue to live in the land of the freeze frame. A time where things would move forward, where he and Miranda would come together as partners and find warmth in each other's embrace, like how this night was supposed to play out when they made plans. But Will knew that could not let that happen, he could not let the veil of ignorance keep him blinded any longer.

When he walked into the living room, he wasn't that surprised to see the Miranda now stood in front of the lit fireplace. Holding her glass as she watched the preforming flames with calculating eyes, for a split-second Will wondered if he should continue his pace over to her, or come up with another excuse to bring some form of once agitating distance between them in order to fully think out his next few steps. That will no doubt twist and mutate this once beautiful night of soft warmth.

Miranda turned her attention away from the fire and a smile quickly came over her face as she laid her eyes on him, putting a stop to that second thought of just leaving in an instant. "Oh you're back," she began as she turned to face him more, "I know my house is big, but I didn't think you could get lost." She chuckled and soon that smile slowly fell, when she noticed Will did not return the small chuckle and her eyes once more began to study his expression. Trying to pick it apart in front of him. "Is everything alright sweetheart?" Miranda asked as she tilted her head and her eyes slowing in their search, clear she could not find an answer in the quiet. To answer the question it was no; everything was not all right at the moment. Because in the next few seconds this night was going to take a turn and Will still could not predict how that turn will end for himself and Miranda. "What's bothering you?"

Will let out a heavy breath, dropping his head as he walked over to Miranda, he could already feel his muscle start to stiffen as if they were trying to prevent him from making the movements that he was doing as he walked to stand in front of her and the fire. Where he felt the inviting heat from it and another heat that surrounded them, that bit harshly into his skin like the mid-summer sun when he was kid in the south. That could cause one to break out into a harsh sweat in mere seconds as soon as you stepped under its unforgiving rays and not even the shad from a tree could save him from the intense heat.

"Yes, Miranda something is bothering me." He answered as he fully stood in front of her, where he felt the unease begin to set in quite quickly and the need to fidget ran though his fingers like small electric pulses. Any way to reroute the uncomfortable filling the rapidly piled inside of him and threated to be knocked over at any moment that it was held inside. "I need to know something Miranda, it's important." Miranda tilted her head, her eyes once again searching him for any indication to what he was feeling or where this conversation was going. But Will made sure to keep his face as neutral as possible.

"And what is that?" She asked with a pulled smile, clear she was a little upset that she could not read Will. Just like when he walked into the room.

"You said you couldn't handle being around fabric scissors," Will breathed out as he fell victim, to his need to fidget and rubbed the back of his neck. "Because of what Brittney did with them." Miranda nodded her head as she took in Will's observants to a statement that

might have seem so small and passed by rather quickly. It really did not need to be brought up again and here he had done that.

“Yes, I did mention that,” she took a sip of her drink, while her eyes looked around the room in a casual manner before they turned to look at him. “Why are you bringing that up, I thought you understood.” She added as she lowered her glass and stared back at him, waiting for him to continue on with what he started to regret.

Will took in another breath as felt his lungs starting to turn to stone on him and his heartbeat picking up inside his chest once again. “I do understand Miranda,” he slowly lowered his hand from his neck as he fought to get the next sentence out of his mouth, that clung to his vocal cords like newly sharpened claws. Refusing to come out and live in the outside world, because it knew as soon as it was spoken that it would end up drawing blood. “What I don’t understand is how you knew that Brittney used fabric scissors.” Will finally pushed out and he waited for Miranda’s response. Which to his surprise was a light chuckle as she lightly shook her head.

“That’s what’s been bothering you sweetheart?” She asked in a light almost condescending tone, that scrapped at Will’s nerves in all the wrong ways. Miranda stopped her chuckling and looked at him with a warm smile that did not sit right with him either. “I was told what the murder weapon was, that’s all.” Miranda spoke as she walked over to Will and began to caress the side of his face in a caring manner, but like the smile the touch did not have its intended effect on him. In fact the once warm and welcoming touch made his skin threaten to prickle on him like so many other touches he received from others, like he was being caressed by a stranger.

“But how,” Will said as he took Miranda’s hand and gently removed it from his face. Feeling how the bracelet brushed up against him. “I know that the team didn’t have the time to tell you and I know that I didn’t tell you either.” He explained and he watched as a micro expression skimmed across Miranda’s face. Wanting to be bigger than it was as it was forced to stay under control and he knew he had hit something with his words.

“Has it ever accrued to that I might have heard about through the news?” She responded and Will easily picked up the accusing tone that she tried to keep under control laced in her voice and that warm smile turned razor sharp. While he felt her hand easily slip away from his and she placed to where she was holding her glass with both hands again.

“It had accrued, but the problem with that is one you stated you don’t pay attention to the news,” Will continued as he felt himself slowly slipping into the mindset of an investigator, a mindset he never thought he’d have to put on in front of Miranda. “Another thing is that what was reported was that she used scissors. It was never specified that they were fabric scissors.” He explained as he closely watched and waited for Miranda’s response. Which at the moment was just a blank stare, clear she was thinking of a response to his observation.

“Well that’s just ridiculous,” Miranda quickly spoke as she turned away from him and began to walk over to the couch. Her posture was stiff, back completely straight and that did not bode well for their current situation. “It’s starting to sound like you are suspecting me of something that I can tell you I do not find very tolerable.” The tone of her voice sounded like a mixture of hurt and anger, but Will could pick up which one of those emotions that were

woven through her voice was how she was really feeling and which one was simply there to pull at him. Make him bend his thinking and want to change it for her own comfort. At one point he might have, left the topic in the past, admit he was wrong and take his words along with his accusation back. But not now, not when things were slowly falling into place and he was finally able mute that voice of doubt that wanted him to act with ignorance. So everything could go back to normal, to that blind bliss he hadn't realized he was living in until a few moments ago.

Miranda must have picked up on something because he watched as her stiff shoulders lowered, when he did not immediately act on her words. Miranda began to turn to look over her shoulder at him, as if she was confirming with herself that he did not act when she calculated that he would, he did not jump to comfort her like so many times before hand. Instead he stood by the fire place and continued to watch her. "Are you really not going to say anything," she said as she turned slightly more, "you're just going to stand there and stare at me while I try to deal with the idea that you believe me to be this cold-hearted murderer," the irritation in her once calm voice was building, Will listened as she dropped the hurt in her tone and let the real emotion breath through and take over. "When in reality she is sitting behind bars as we speak."

"Is she though." Will finally spoke, his voice was as empty as he was starting to feel. If he glanced down at the floor he wondered if he could see those once held onto and cherished feelings pooling at his feet. Leaving him as a hollow shell in mere seconds. The statement he had just made, made him feel as though he had just washed his mouth out with acid, it burned with an unforgiving sting and it left imaginary blisters in its wake. Miranda slowly turned to face him fully, her eyes were a bit wide and for a second Will wondered if just like the hurt in her voice, was that also an act that she was starting to put on or if it was real.

"Of course she is," Miranda said as a smile made from disbelief formed on her face, "what kind of accusation is that Will?" She asked while she loosely crossed her arms, the smile never leaving.

"It's not an accusation is it." Will once again spoke agitating the sting in his mouth and the hollowness grew more and more as he continued to stare at her. Miranda let out a chuckle and shook her head as she began to walk back over to him and the sound of her clicking heels sounded far too loud, they matched with the rising pulse he began to feel.

"Sweetheart," Miranda said in a much calmer voice that had too much sweetness coating the name, it had his teeth aching at just hearing it. While he watched her approach and he felt his muscles twitch. To start a movement to get him to step back and keep a distance between them, but he kept himself in place. He knew the first time he showed signs of movement that it would cause her to possibly strike, he better stay still, but alert. As she walked over to him it seemed she was trying to get him to change his mind. If showing signs of being hurt did not work on him, now she was going to try and sweet talk him to get his mind to turn. "You know it is a silly accusation, Brittney is the Black Widow, the evidence pointed to her and she also had a very strong motive." She now stood in front of him again still holding that smile that tried to be something it clearly was not.

“Yes, she did have those elements working against her, but then again they seemed to fill in the slots a little bit too well,” Will replied and that sentence began to move things around in his mind, pushing facts and observations that where chained down for far too long. All caused by that element of denial that first appeared in his mind since Miranda was speculated, that would have helped him make his mind up and clear his vision. “Like how she would accidently leave behind a piece of evidence that would put her at the scene when before that she managed to make it appear she was never there.”

“That is true, but you yourself admitted that could have been because she was feeling highly emotional.” Miranda countered all too pleased with her response, shooting the statement down like a wounded dove.

“I also said I felt like it was planted there, a red herring.” Will replied and like that those chained down observations and facts slid into their places. That once flickering image that fought so hard to be overlaid on Brittney found its rightful owner. “Like how that driver’s license and scissors were planted in Brittney’s apartment.” Will added as he felt himself finally hollowed out, as he felt himself untangling from the spider’s web, he had snared himself in for so long.

Miranda’s eyes widen slightly and another chuckle came from her lips. “Now you are insinuating that I had planted evidence framing Brittney for murder?” she shook her head, “Sweetheart, I think you are taking this a bit too far, perhaps we should call the night here and see what a few more days apart can bring us.”

“For those days apart will it be during your trip to London, the same trip that falls so close to Brittney’s imprisonment?” As soon as the question left Will’s mouth he watched the muscle of Miranda’s jaw twitch slightly, he had hit another spot. Her mask was threating to crack in front of him and it was something he found himself wanting. To finally see the real her and not the woman she had dressed up as while around him. The one he thought he was growing very attached to over their months together, the woman he could see a life being built with. Instead he needed to see the wolf that laid under the sheep’s wool. Will watched as another ripple of agitation crossed her features once more and it had Will wondering for a moment how many blows she could take before her mask cracked and came crumbling down. “You knew it would look suspicious that the murders suddenly stopped when you left the country. If their connections to your company did not already set off an alarm that would. So you had to make it look like the Black Widow was finally caught in order to take that trip and you had found the perfect scapegoat in Brittney. A young woman who would do anything to please you, her need to do right and small growing crush. Fit so well with the idea of an obsessed employee fueled by jealousy.”

“This is ridiculous,” Miranda said with enough held back frustration in her tone as she sharply turned and Will felt a breeze as her hair fanned out while it happened. “All these accusations you are piling on top of me because what?” She quickly turned and her anger was no longer hidden, no longer fully under her control. “I misspoke.” She said and Will could feel her need to scream her words at him, the mask was cracking right in front of him.

“Sometimes the smallest mistakes can help clear the pathway to ones thinking,” Will said as he kept his voice under control. Which he found shockingly easy, since most of his emotions

were pooling around his feet the more, he stood in front of her. “Just like how the simplest of things can easily cause the minds thinking to suddenly halt.” Miranda continued to stare at Will, dissecting his words and trying to find her next angle to play at. But she was running out of space and Will found himself quickly putting the pieces together. That was when a thought emerged inside of his mind, something was buried so far back that Will never actually paid much attention to it in the first place. He was far too caught up in the battle zone that was his mind and trying to find shelter that it never actually came to fully form for him and something told him that if it had that perhaps the battle could have ended far faster. “You know something. You were so keen on trying to prove the Brittney was the Black Widow and I was more than willing to accept it that one crucial aspect never crossed my mind.” Will spoke.

Miranda rolled her eyes; clear she was growing tired of this conversation and knew that the snare might tighten any moment. “And what is that?” She asked, no longer trying to fight the fact the Will was going to continue to think of her as a murderer the more this conversation went on between the two. The more his train of thought kept speeding down the twisted tracks with no intention of stopping, the breaks were severed and the engine was roaring. There were no signs of coming to a halt any time soon for Will, his mind was finally being cleared of the debris.

“The body parts taken from all four victims were never found.” That simple sentence had a strong ripple effect, the air in the room that felt like a building whirlwind suddenly halted, as everything came to a standstill. They were standing in the eye of the storm now, both completely silent, waiting for the others reaction to the blaringly obvious flaw that had been sitting above the water, yet invisible to the searching eye. Miranda simply stood there staring at him, her expression was that of nearly pure shock, though he could see she was trying to hold it together. But her mask was already severely cracked to let that happen.

“And what about it,” Miranda spoke with a small scoff and her voice held a note of disbelief. “Ever thought that perhaps she had gotten rid of them?” She asked with a tilt of her head, clear she had thought of this combat, like how she had thought of ways to pin this all against Brittney. But she did not expect for Will to slowly shake his head, denying her words.

“No, if she was the Black Widow, she would have kept them.” Will began to look around the room. “They were her trophies, something she could view and get a rush of superiority when she did.” He continued to look around the large room, dissecting the area that they had spent some nights together in. Nights that always lead to the heated land of entwined pleasure. “So no she would never get rid of them in fact,” Will finally landed his view on the fireplace, “she would want to keep them in place where she could enjoy her accomplishment even while it was hidden from view.” The words came out his mouth like dust. It floated in the air and polluted it at the same time, it was made from the dead and scattered around the room contaminating it. As the final slot in his mind was filled and the last of the debris was cleared. Will slowly turned to look at Miranda and all she did was stare back at him, their eyes connected and like everything else Will felt the urge to break that connection, something he thought he would never feel like doing with her.

“Oh if you are insinuating what I think you are.” Miranda began to say as pure disbelief coated her words and causing more of her mask to crack. Will could see pieces chipping

away and fall to the floor, just like how his emotions were pooling around him. Both of them were losing something as they stayed in each other's company. Will didn't even wait to listen to the rest of Miranda's act of preservation, he turned back towards the fireplace and picked up the slim remote that sat proudly on top of it. It weighed almost nothing in his hand as he stared down at it, where he noticed that one of the very few buttons on the remote was more worn out than the rest. "Now sweetheart, I know what you might be thinking," Will wasn't all that surprised to hear the sudden change in her voice. That control she held so close to her was now fully slipping from her grasp and she was desperate to get it back. "But honestly all this is just so absurd don't you think?" Will continued to stare at the remote, blocking out her words his thumb hesitantly hovering over the well-used button and his heart pounding in his chest. "Sweetheart please don't." Miranda softly said and Will felt the last bit of his emotions drain from him, leaving him completely hollowed out. Will took a deep breath, ignoring Miranda's soft plea and whatever might have been left of that small voice that wanted him to not press the button as he felt his thumb come down on the remote.

It was late in the night or perhaps one could argue that it was simply early in the morning, the sun had not yet begun its assent into the sky, where it would begin to paint it to fit itself, turning cool tones warm then sold with the natural blue it revealed in its bright light. The moon still held its territory, in the dark endless background only thing emitting any light was itself and the cluster of bright stars that shared the space with it. Making it hard to exactly call what this time was, because though it was well past midnight, making it Monday. Labeling it early morning still did not feel right for some odd reason.

Hannibal was just glad that his time as a Doctor in the ER, along with his other savory activities made it to where he could easily adjust to these odd time frames. Here he had thought it would be another dull time for him, the night had dragged on far too long. The silence of his house pestered him the right amount that he had felt himself becoming restless, he found some of his more creative hobbies were lacking with reasons he could not place. Like the way the graphite from his pencil did not easily glide over his paper or how when he had fixed himself another art piece for dinner it still did not sit quite right to him. He did not feel that small spark he often did when he had completed another dish. Though the flavors were at their peak when he had consumed his first bite, he could feel that something was lacking.

Yet for what was a very much dull and lack luster of night that only ended because he found himself retiring to bed earlier than he mostly would. It all changed when his phone had gone off, awakening him from his escape from the stale night and bringing him back to reality. He had felt a small sting of annoyance when he was awoken with the piercing sound of his phone calling out for his attention. Making him entertain the idea of perhaps turning it off the next time he laid his head to rest. It also had him wondering if that was how Will felt most times, called on a case with no regards for his own comforts. But those thoughts drifted away when he noticed the caller id.

That was how he had found himself pulling up to Miranda's house in the limbo of time, the once proudly stood house that fit perfectly with the rest of the neighborhood. Was now painted in the silent flashing of red and blue lights as it was surrounded by police cars and other investigator vehicles. The first thing he noticed was Will's Volvo sitting amongst the government assigned cars, sticking out much like its owner did when surrounded by those

who drove said vehicles. Hannibal pulled up next to the Volvo, a little surprised to see it empty, lacking its owner. A place Hannibal had theorized that Will might have gone to protect himself, in the confines of something that was all his. Another small escape he could run off to and try and rebuild himself while the word around him crumbled. His own piece of salvation, to tide himself over until he could escape to his larger land of isolation that was his farmhouse. Where he could quickly patch himself together with the help from his beloved pack and the never ending quite that was provided for him.

The doctor stepped out of the car as he took in the sight of all the ant like federal agents scrambling round the large property. All looking for evidence, combing through the well-trimmed bushes and large yard. Trying to find worthy crumbs to bring back to their interpret leader, that would fill his hunger. None of them paying much attention to the new addition to the group as they continued to scavenge for anything that would keep their leader off their back and help close the once already shut case. Even though Hannibal stood outside in the cold air that nipped at his skin and gave hint to what the winter would be like in a few more weeks, he could almost feel the heat of Jack's frustration pouring out of the elegant house. Like heavy fog that traveled along the ground, that coated your feet and bit at your ankles while you tried to walk through it. Wondering if it would cause your footsteps to become heavy or would it travel up your pant leg and infect you. Though that might have been what the other's wonder, Hannibal knew he was above that. He would simply walk through the heavy fog with ease, not letting it ground his footsteps or crawl up his leg while he made his way to the source. It was that thinking joined with the odd feeling of elated pleasure that coated him like one of his more well-tailored high-priced suits. That was gifted to him all thanks to that one middle of the night phone call. A phone call he now wished he was able to have recorded, so he could listen back to it from time to time. As though he was playing another lovely symphony.

Hannibal casually made his way towards the house, the last time he had seen it full of life was a few months ago. While he stalked in the shadows, while he observed the two oblivious bodies inside the house and planned his next move. Calculated the next step to take, all before even interacting with Miranda, the very woman who at the time hardly felt like a threat to him at all. Who once made that pestering feeling of the now nearly exterminated jealousy boil to life and infect his once well held together emotions. Now he was able to walk around the property in the open, no need to stay hidden, no need to hide his observation, or plan an escape if he was ever caught. He was gifted free range in the open and he almost felt greedy to take all of it for its misguided advantage. But in reality, there really wasn't any need for the advantage now, not when he knew in one of those squad cars, there sat Miranda. Her wrist tightly cuffed and left to stew in her failure while she watched as her well-built world imploded on her.

I wonder which one of these vehicles are going to act as your vessel across the river Styx Rhettford, which one do you sit in like a caged animal waiting to be transported to a more permanent holding. All while I am still able to roam your very territory until my own hearts content. Hannibal thought as he walked through the barrier cars, with a well-hidden smirk pulling at his lips. A twisted part of himself wanted to seek out whatever car she was being held in, just so he could walk past it. Stroll past her gaze and feel it's blistering heat on him, the only thing that could pass the bullet proof glass. Feel it lash out at him like a wild animal and try to inflict imaginary damage onto him as he simply walked by, pretending to ignore

her while he made his way towards her house. Making her realize that he now had complete control over their game. That he was now going to claim victor all while he headed into her house. Tainting it, much like she did his. The victory that was now at arm's length was going to taste and feel so devilishly heavenly for him.

But instead of following through with that petty act; no matter how delicious it sounded, Hannibal had to remind himself of the reason for him being called down here. He had to make sure that Will survived this treacherous blow that no doubt left the man in near pieces. If watching Miranda's world implode around her was a show than laying eyes on Will any moment will be a grand play. The doctor could practically predict what might be running through the others mind at this moment.

How are you holding up my dear Will? Are you a hectic mess of misery, you heart has just been ripped out of your chest and your trust trampled on. I bet you are falling apart as I slowly approach the house of your once lover. The same woman who had played you like she had played myself. But unlike you, I have come out of this unscathed. Perhaps a blow to the ego, but that can be easily repaired, I've done it before. But for you Will, this is something far worse, you are now in the sea of the unknown with a storm surrounding you as you threaten to go under. What a sight this will be once I find you.

Hannibal walked up to the porch, there was an odd sense of satisfaction being able to enter the house through the open door. All while he had to dodge two scurrying agents who bustled passed him, not paying him any mind as they went on about their duty. If it wasn't for this magnificent stroke of luck, a gift from the deity that had been tormenting him for the past four months. He might have felt the subtle sting of annoyance towards the two, but instead he continued inside the large house. Which was a stark contrast from the last time he had set foot into the domain of the now properly labeled Black Widow.

The house was properly lit, giving him a better view of the inside. Instead of simply wondering the premises in the dark and underneath Miranda's nose. His eyes slowly took in the surrounding, the white and gold that despite the circumstance still held its pristine appearance. *It seems to me that the woman who is no doubt going to be labeled as another devil to walk amongst the earth has found appeal living with the colors that symbolize Heavon. Perhaps as a way to escape your fate, ease the mind of where your mortal soul will end up Rhettford?* Hannibal thought as he followed the noise of where he might find the group of agents that he had come to know.

When he turned into the very room he had once seen Will stand in and soon later himself, to say that he was taken back would describe only half of what he felt. Hannibal's eyes laid on a very particular scene that he never thought he would witness. There the very fire place he had once witness Will and Miranda embrace in a vulgar act of hormonal intimacy was somehow detached from its original place and moved to the side. The more he looked at the fireplace the more he took in, the whole wall itself not just the fireplace had been unfastened from the rest of the house's structure and was able to move to the side and be placed back. Thanks to a mechanical component traveling though the open side that would click into place it's other self that was built into the house. When moved it Revealed a hidden space that Miranda would be the only one who knew about it.

Well it seems you and I have another thing in common Rhettford, though that statement itself is very irksome. We both have a taste for hidden passages. He thought to himself as he approached the obvious beacon of interest. Seeing more and more of what was concealed behind the fireplace, hidden from oblivious eyes, where most of the commotion was being born in. As he approached Hannibal began to catch either the beginning or the middle of a conversation. So in order to keep that conversation going he slowed his approach.

"All I am saying is he slept with a woman who was known to chop off a man's well manhood after having sex." Came the familiar voice of Zeller followed by a sigh from another person if Hannibal was correct which he knew he was it was no doubt Jimmy who had sighed.

"And what exactly are you trying to get at?" Jimmy asked, the annoyance not lost in his tone.

"It just makes you wonder how ya know." There was a pause, probably the man was waiting for the other to put the pieces together.

"No, I don't."

"Jeez, do I have to spell it out for you, it makes you wonder how good he is! That's what I am getting at." The frustration in the investigators voice was enough to match Jack's at that point.

"Are we really having this conversation now, look where we are standing." Came Jimmy's just as frustrated voice that matched the others, clear he wanted to hurry up and do his job and get out of the room.

"I sometimes wonder if I'm the only mature one in the group." Came Beverly's cool voice and Hannibal found himself slightly startled by her sudden appearance, clear how drawn he was into the little bickering match that was taking place just beyond his vision. He turned slightly to see her standing just behind him adjusting the scope of her camera, not looking up at him. "Then I catch them talking like that and it turns those wonders into confirmations." She added before heading inside the once hidden room to join the rest of her team. Hannibal waited for few moments, before he followed her lead, if asked why, he would simply state he was looking for Will. Even though that was somewhat true he still hadn't found the younger man and a part of his mind was occupied in trying to predict where in this large house had Will gone to protect himself from the rest. Another part that now drove his movements were his own curiosity on what Miranda had hidden.

There hidden form the world was a very elegant small square room. With dark red velvet carpeting, dark oak walls and sitting in the middle of the small room was a white and gold winged chair; similar to the one that sat by the bookshelf. Next to the chair was a sleek black table which purpose was to only hold something small perhaps a wine glass and hanging from the ceiling was a small version of the electric chandelier that hung in her living room. The room was ment for solitaire and peace, an escape from the outside world, a place where Miranda could sit and bask in her triumph. Hannibal's eyes moved around taking in its elegant and dark colors that did not match the rest of the house, the room represented the real Miranda. That lurked beneath the surface, kept hidden just like this room, that was never ment to be seen. Yet she showed some of that side to Hannibal, all the times they had moments alone, there were small glimpses of what she hid from the public, from Will and in

all honesty that should have set off some suspicion on his part. But like back in the break room down at the Bureau, he had come to the conclusion he had let himself be blinded by the game she had set up for them to play. That realization still stung, the fact he had let himself become so fully wrapped in this now petty game of trying to win Will's attention like two adolescent teenagers fighting over their crush. It had damaged his ego to some degree, but knowing the truth about Miranda and where it was leading her. That help begin his own healing process.

As Hannibal's eyes took in the room something quickly caught his attention and refused to let it go while he stood in the entrance of the hidden chamber. What kept the three investigators busy was what sat on the single selves that the one lone chair was angled towards. The reason the first ignorant officer that had discovered the second body left by Miranda and had the FBI believe for a moment that he had struck again. There on the selves were Miranda's trophies, placed in specimen jars and floating in what he might guess alcohol, were the missing genitals of her victims. Sitting well preserved on their own selves, with what Hannibal thought was quite amusing was the degrative golden name plates underneath them, with the first initial of the men's name followed by their last name etched in an elegant font. In the middle of the little trophy wall perfectly presented and holding a rather nice shine was the actual murder weapon, a pair of gold-plated fabric scissors. The held a sharpness that could easily cut a single strand of hair and more impressively cut through human flesh.

"I'm glad you could come on such a short notice Doctor." Came a very familiar bronze voice and Hannibal slowly turned his attention away from Miranda's trophy room and towards where the voice came from.

"Of course, after the troublesome news on the phone. I felt that it would be wise not to hesitate." Hannibal said as he fully turned towards a very solemn faced Jack Crowford. Who seemed to be dealing with mixture of emotions, if Hannibal had to list what he believed they were he would say frustration, tiredness, and perhaps worry. The worry being for how his special agent was going to be now that he had just received such a drastic blow and the cracks that were already forming had just splintered, there were no doubts that chips had come off.

"Yeah," Jack breathed out in a hot huff of air as he slowly began to look at the room, "a part of me still doesn't want to believe it to be true. Here she was the Black Widow hiding in plain sight and we still could not see her."

"Miss. Rhettford made sure that we did not suspect her, by hiding in plain sight she increased her invisibility." Hannibal stated in an attempt as hushing the man's ego, an ego he had no time to enjoy being bruised at the moment since his own was also damaged. Leaving him in the same boat as Jack, a boat that he wanted to step foot off of as soon as possible.

"She was in our grasp, we had her in an interrogating room. Hell we laid out the connections right in front of her and everything." Hannibal could feel the blistering anger beginning to pour off of the head agent. "Yet she still managed to slip away from us." Jack said as he shook his head and turned away from the room and began to make his way into the living room.

“She had fooled all of us Jack not just yourself.” Hannibal said, trying to both sooth the anger, but also poke at it. To conflict the man’s emotions some more, he watched as the man stopped in his tracks, took a deep breath, and lowered his head slightly. Like always taking in Hannibal’s words and letting them rule over his thoughts. “Besides you are not the injured party in all of this.” He continued, laying down the right amount of guilt that would help himself off the shared boat and back into his own vessel.

“You’re right, I’m not.” Jack said as he lifted his head, attempting to stop stewing in whatever emotional turmoil he was facing. “Here everyone thought that she was the best thing that could happen for him and it turns out she was the worst.” He said as he shook his head and rubbed the back of his neck. “I don’t know how he is going to recover from all this.”

“He will, but it might take some time, has he said or done anything since you and your team showed up?”

“No, he just explained everything over the phone and that was it.” Jack turned his attention towards the doctor and Hannibal could see actual concern in his dark eyes. “He hasn’t said a word since just left us to do our jobs. He seemed almost like a statue completely empty.” The concern in his eyes leaked into his words. Clear he cared about the special agent and what he was going through. “I know I can’t get to him if I tried, so I thought.”

“That I could be able to lead him back from the storm that is no doubt plaguing him?”

Jack nodded his head. “I saw him take off this way, I believe he is in the backyard. Away from all the eyes.” Jack began to lead Hannibal over to where the two familiar French doors were and the only thing that could be seen was the aqua blue of the large pool. The same pool that had his own imagination turning on him and giving him sights of a future he did not want to see come into fruition. “I just know that this is going to be hell for him for a while.” Jack sighed as he stopped at the door, staring out in to the open.

“Will was used to being protected by the barriers he put up, keeping those around at a distance in order to preserve himself from a world that he feels is out to get him. Now the first person he had let in and purposely opened himself to has just destroyed them,” Hannibal let out a well-placed sigh as he held his arms in front of himself, while he too looked out through the glass of the door. Noting his reflection matching that with Jack’s. “The damage that he will be feeling for a while will no doubt cause him to isolate himself further than before. He will start questioning who he can truly trust, who can he let in again. The walls he will be putting up will no doubt be stronger than before.”

“I know, that’s why I’m not expecting any miracles from you Doctor. I just want you to make sure he doesn’t fully slip away.” Jack said before he turned and walked away. To check up on the rest of the team, leaving Hannibal to stand in front of the door. Who waited a few more moments, not wanting to rush to be by Will’s side. Knowing if he showed that he was willing to fill in a spot, to show support that would cause the empath to close in on himself even more than he already was. So Hannibal was careful in his next moment, talking or even being near Will when he was in a somewhat vulnerable state was like walking on cracked ice. Every move could cause another crack to form and risk falling through, that and paired with the fact that he acted like a safe when it came to others. Keeping himself locked up and

Hannibal already found a way to crack that safe once, but now thanks to Miranda the safe was shut again and the lock was changed. This was going to be a difficult task to deal with for weeks to come, but he was up for the challenge.

Hannibal stepped outside and was greeted by the quiet of the night and cool air once again, a welcome change from the buzz of the irritated hive that was the house. His eyes scanned the area looking for the allusive empath and he quickly caught sight of the other. Sitting in one of the few chairs that sat by the side of the pool. Hannibal took in how lost the other looked, his once storm filled eyes completely vacant of that fire that always laid beneath the surface as they stared at the calm waters of the pool. His expression was blank, no sign of any kind of emotion that was raging inside and his posture was slightly stiff. Hannibal began to make his approach, acting like he did when he it came to their very first session together, approaching Will like the man was a wounded animal and ready to strike at any moment.

As he approached, he noticed a few things that caught his attention. One was that Will was once again wearing that once appealing waistcoat, which brought some amusement to the doctor. *That must be rather difficult for you Will, to be here sitting in that once treasured article of clothing. The very gift the Rhettford put so much time into, the same woman who not so long ago ripped out your heart and destroyed the trust you rarely give out. Now that gift clings to you, constricts you as a painful reminder of what happened only a few moments ago.* Hannibal thought as he continued to make his way over where the second thing caught his attention. In Will's lap was none other than that black and white cat that he had met while he stalked the grounds. Now curled up in the profiler's lap, its tail wrapped around its body, eyes closed in contentment and he heard the soft sound of purring erupting from the feline. While Will gently ran his hand over the back of the cat, eyes focused on the pool, face still blank and body slightly stiff. The cat, though enjoying the pleasure of Will's pet was doing its own version of trying to give comfort to the broken man, merely with its presence and purrs.

The cat's green eyes flashed opened as if it sensed Hannibal's approach and it*s* pupils turned to razor thin slits. Not quite ready to show obvious signs of aggression towards the man it sensed pure evil coming its way, but making it known the man that it was ready to do so if he tried anything. Hannibal only paid the cat little attention a bit pleased that the animal remembered him as he took a seat in the second chair that was only separated from the other thanks to a small table. Was when his eyes caught the final thing to stand out. Resting in Will's other hand, dangling between the closed fist was a vey nice charm bracelet that was turned the same color of the water and Hannibal knew just by the small look he could catch from the piece of jewelry that Will had put time into picking it out. Knowing this made the whole scene even greater than it was for the doctor. Another layer of damage to play around in, to twist and pull at for those weeks to come until Will had rebuilt himself.

Hannibal was not surprised in the slightest that only the cat had acknowledged his presence in the moment. As soon as he had stepped outside, he could tell that Will had fully reverted into himself. Attempting to put out the raging wild fire inside his mind and body. Repairing himself and finding ways to reinforce his next wall that he will be surrounding himself. The outside world no longer existed to him; he had found safety in his mind while his body was trapped in the surrounding that had caused him so much damage.

I know you can sense me Will; I know that you have noticed me from the corner of your eyes and a part of you must feel somewhat at ease to see me here. I also know that you are in no mood to talk, to discuss what is happening. But while I sit here next to you, in the quiet of the night. You must also know that I'll always be here when you do decide to come back from where ever it is that your mind has taken you to. I will be waiting for as long as you need me to.

Twice As Shy

Chapter Summary

> Time had passed since that heart ripping night at Miranda's and now the trail is the last thing Will must face. Though his walls are taller and barriers strong, there what lies behind is a still broken heart.

Chapter Notes

> Soooooooooo turns out I was worse..... I want to apologize greatly. I just can't help but get distracted by other things and my mind gets invested and before I know it months past. So this is no ones fault but my own and I am so sorry for keeping you all waiting. I'm letting you guys know now that this story is NOT dead or abandoned. It's just being written by someone who has a weak attention span.
>
> Any way I hope you guys enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal had kept to his silent vow, as he had waited for Will to come back to him from where ever his mind had taken him. It had taken time and that he wasn't surprised of, it always took Will time to pick himself back up after a few hard blows. Yet this one was the hardest blow he knew that the other must have taken. Picking himself up and trying to step back into the world he once roamed through took longer than what most would have thought. Jack had gifted the man some time off, a few weeks of no calls needing him for a case or two, and Alana had offered to help with his classes. They both suspected Will to come back around after a week or two, which he had. Reemerging from his solitaire, after repairing himself somewhat using his isolation and the unconditional support from his pack, but what he came back as was nothing, but a walking suit. A mask, an appearance he clearly wore to give worried minds a rest. A disguise to pass by quizzical eyes, an appearance that presented itself as what they designated as whole again as he performed acts that were expected of him and only those acts. He never faltered from those tasks that were set up for him to do.

When poked or prodded at by those who were worried about him and wanted to know how he was holding up, questions asked that were not revolving around investigating or lecturing, Will would tighten his jaw. He did not lash out, bite at the probing finger, raise his hackles, he did none of that, even though it was clearly expected of him to do. Instead he buried further in on himself and would make up an excuse to leave the situation, or find a way to change the subject. Refocusing the eyes that were on him, on to something else so he could keep his new suit whole. It was clear that the suit he wore for others was only designed with two functions

in mind. What was hidden beyond that he kept under lock and key; that key held close to his still under repaired heart. With far more obstacles to fight through if one wanted to reach it. The same went with his mind, something that had the ability to be so opened to the world, that could expand beyond others limits and take in much more than others expected. Was now contained in a stronger cage, with titanium bars that surrounded it, protected far more than any fort could.

Hannibal had waited for his turn to be presented the new more guarded Will Graham to come to him. Though there were times where he had grown a bit restless with waiting, no longer able to satisfy his hunger with second hand stories he had heard from a very concern and guilt-ridden Alana. Who felt as though all this could have been avoided is she had not pushed will into taking such a leap. The same woman who was the first to tell him about Will's new development in his life, pleased to see that he was coming out of his shell was quick to voice her sorrows to him. It was amusing to see how fast she could turn and how easy it was for her to point the finger at herself. But after pushing past such a one-sided conversation filled with him telling her that she should know better than to put all this on her shoulders and that she was just looking out of Will's best interest. He had managed to turn the topic back to the other man and Alana was quick to inform Hannibal about what had happened and how it affected Will, all that he had learned from her made a part of him want to experience it for himself. To see how Will was presenting himself to others, to take in what was being describe to him instead of not having to rely on outside perspective that he had received from both Alana and Jack. Though Alana had came to him to give him her grievance looking for a shoulder to lean on, with Jack it took another dinner invitation to have the man spill his words and view on this supposedly new Will Graham. Which how the other described him, was stiffer and more cautious of others. Even towards those who claimed to be Will's friends, he had put a distance between them. It was as though he had started all over again with the team, but this time he was making sure he wasn't going to let anyone in or near him. Completely closing himself off as much as humanly possible.

That did explain one of the many reasons why Will had yet came around to him, the empath had reset himself. Had found the best way to deal with the wreaked world that he now lived in and that was to start over, but this time he was keeping everyone at arm's length. Perhaps even further than that, taking all precautions he could and adding onto it. That ment when it came to their own interactions it was going to be far more difficult to get Will to find an even ground to stand on. Hannibal already knew the way they had started out was on quaking grounds, where he first gotten a taste of what could be a very promising experience for him to live through. A moment he would not trade in for a smoother outcome. He had enjoyed the very first bite Will had given him during their first interaction, often going back to that memory, to feel that little sting of imaginary incisors and the burn of venom laced agitation from time to time. Just so he could relive those odd feelings he had felt. Feeling of uncertainty and promise of what lied beyond the other. But now if Hannibal's speculations were right and Will really had reset himself, then it might be far more complicated to coax the man back to where they were.

But Hannibal had time to prepare for such a difficult task to overcome, though Will had reentered his work life, he had yet reentered the rest of his somewhat social life that revolved around the doctor. It had taken Will the two weeks given to him to step back into the role that was expected of him, but it took him longer to step back into the role Hannibal wanted of

him. Every time their scheduled conversation came up, a day before he would receive a message on his answering machine that canceled the appointment. This did not surprise him; he knew that Will was going to play difficult. He always did when it came to their shared sessions, though he showed up on time and stayed for the required hour and then longer when invited to, the empath was always difficult when it came to their conversations. Matching metaphor with metaphor, stepping around question or observation, it was their own little dance.

Now Will was putting distance between them, stepping out of their dance one appointment after another. He had found parts of the day where he knew that the doctor would not be able to pick up his phone, knowing some part of the psychiatrist's schedule that gave him the opportunity to leave the message without having to talk to the other. There were moments where Hannibal tried to catch the call, in order to coax the man to attend his appointments, to rejoin him in their dance, but like the empath himself the calls were elusive. Made during times where he could not simply stand around his phone, as if the other sensed when he was away and that was when he would strike. It was almost impressive, but in reality, it was quite irritating. Especially when the canceled appointments kept growing and growing, to the point Hannibal had thought about driving out to Will's piece of isolation and face the man himself. But every time those impulsive desires crawled to the forefront of his mind and had him aching to act on his curiosity and need to see this new image that Will had made for himself. Hannibal simply reminded himself about the old saying he often tried to live by of patients being a virtue, it had delivered himself quite far in life and had given him ample rewards for it.

And reward it did, because late one night while Hannibal indulged in one of his saner hobbies that involved a decent book, a hungry fire, and a rich wine, it had struck him. That Will had not made the expected call to cancel their session. There was no message left for him to listen to, to try and paint a picture of what to expect when only given by the monotone voice that came from the younger man. Instead he was gifted nothing and for once he was pleased by such a gift, because that ment he had something to finally look forward to during his work week. No longer will he have to fend off his hunger with simply word of mouth, he would finally have something sustainable.

Hannibal watched with starved eyes as Will slowly walked above him in the upper level, nearly reenacting their first ever session. Him keeping a far distance from the curious doctor, in a both figurative and literal way. Will barely paid Hannibal any mind as he slowly walked around in front of the well-kept book shelf, unlike the doctor those held the other's eyes; even though Hannibal knew that they did not hold Will's attention. Hannibal wasn't that surprised when Will had walked over to the ladder and began to climb it, he had almost expected it. He knew the three choices Will decided over when it came to their time together in the large office. If Will sat it ment that he was open for conversation; that he was ready for where it would lead, when Will wondered it ment it would be somewhat of a challenge to keep his mouth and mind open. A challenge that often had the ripest rewards, like a ready to pick fruit from the lowest branch begging to plucked for the taken. Because that also ment that his mind was working overtime and it kept his body moving to help deal with his crowded space. Then came the time when Will would take stance in the upper level, that was where all difficulties were born. This ment that he was going to put up a fight, he was on guard.

“Though I do have a large collection of literature, all ranging from different topics I highly doubt that is the reason you drove the all the way down here.” Hannibal spoke as he watched as Will wondered the upper level.

“Perhaps it is.” Will mumbled as he reached out and traced a few of the spines of the books, not taking in what they held behind there covers. Hannibal knew he had to work hard to get Will to open up, he had to be sly about his words as well when he did this. Will was guarded and wasn’t going to simply walk into the major conversation Hannibal wanted to be discussed. Hannibal tilted his head slightly no longer focused on Will as a whole, but a part of the man’s body that was revealed while the profiler touched the leather spine of a book.

“I noticed you went back to your old watch.” Hannibal plainly stated his eyes focused on the wristwatch that still held a crack in it from one of Will’s dogs. That fit far better on the man’s wrist than that titanium eyesore, but that wasn’t the only thing he noticed going on with Will. As soon as the man had walked in after he had greeted him, hunched shoulders and stiffed back was the familiar aroma of that dreadful aftershave that Will once revealed he received far too many times as a Christmas gift. No longer did he reek mock spring, but something that Hannibal started to refer to as Will himself, though he still had the idea of gifting him something that would complement the man. The holiday session was around the corner and Will was already accustom to receiving such gift during that time.

Will did not respond right away, instead he lowered his arm and pushed his sleeve down, the fabric fighting against the pull, clear it couldn’t meet the demand completely. “Yeah, I got rid of it.” Will simply stated his voice empty, but at the same time still heavy with emotions.

“Was that the only gift you disposed of?” Hannibal asked, a question made to sound innocent, but filled with malicious intent. Will let out a heavy sigh and went back to looking at the spine of the books.

“No.” Was all he said.

I wonder Will did it take you a week, a day, to cleanse yourself of what was left of Rhettford. Or was it the first thing you did when you got home. Knowing that your safe haven was now contaminated and the only way to make it yours again was to quickly dispose of all that remained of her. I wonder what you did to see the act through, did you simply throw it all away or perhaps took a more drastic approach. Too bad you’ll never know how pleased I feel that it happened in the first place. Hannibal thought as he let the simple word fill in some space before he decided to push forward. As a pulse of welcomed pleasure drifted under his skin as he found solace in the thought of Will riding himself of any trace of Miranda.

“I was informed that Miss. Rhettford’s trial is approaching, it will be next week.” Hannibal responded once the door to the next step into the true conversation was opened, though it was only a crack there was enough room for Hannibal to slip his fingers through. Seeing how Will flinched at Miranda’s last name, the way his spin stiffened and shoulders drew in, an enjoyable sight to take in. It not only had the edge of Hannibal’s lips wanting to pull into a smile, but had him wanting to press twice as hard just to see what else might happen. *It seems I have hit a damaged nerve by simply mentioning Rhettford’s last name, though you have yet said anything your body has developed its own involuntary response. Do you do the*

same thing when others mention the woman who ripped out your heart, or is it just when I do it?

Will raised one of his shoulders as he tilted his head to the side, so his ear made contact with it. The discomfort he felt towards the subject was enticingly savory for Hannibal to witness. "You heard correctly, they wanted to speed the trial date, in order to preserve any public image they still have." Will said, clear he was fighting to get the words out, as he continued to stare at the bookshelf.

"So, if we were to continue this line of conversation, we are taking than I must also assume that is the only reason you have chosen to hold this appointment," Hannibal said as he watched for the next bodily response he could pull from the other, by adding on some guilt as well. An obvious weakness for the profiler, always bending when he is made to feel just the slightly tinge of guilt injected into his mind. Will simply stood there, still not turning around, but he did slowly lower his hand and slid it into the pocket of his jacket. "Instead of gifting me with another voice message of how you will not be coming to our normal session time." Hannibal once again felt the tug at his lips when he noticed the response, he was slowly prying the tighten jaw open.

"You know what they say about assuming Doctor." Will heavily breathed out; clear he was still going to put up a fight when it came to the topic as a whole. All Hannibal had to do was find more weak points in that armor that the other had on. Will's newly crafted suit wasn't completely perfect, not when it came to Hannibal and the doctor knew that.

"Yes, I am familiar with the saying, but I do not believe it applies to myself when it seems that my observations are correct." Will let out another deep breath and ducked his head slightly.

"They want me to go on the stand." Will's voice lacked structure as it was filled with uncertainty and doubt. Hannibal watched as Will removed his hand from his pocket and began to rub the back of his neck. The unease the other was going through was leaking out of him by the gallons and it help feed the hunger Hannibal had been suffering though for weeks.

"You have gone on the stand before, why should this time be any different?" Hannibal probed and was rewarded when Will quickly turned on his heels to look down at the other, with blistering anger in those now raging stormed colored eyes. The way his hands tightly gripped the railing as though he was holding himself back as he stared down at Hannibal, his jaw set tight and muscles stiff. Hannibal could compare the sight to an angry deity casting down upon his follower. Hannibal knew at that moment that his feisty mongoose has finally emerged from under the house porch and was ready to strike at the snake that slithered by. How he missed that sight.

"You know why." Will said, though his voice did not rise in anger, the aggressive emotion still coated his words and paired with the little snarl that he could not fight, made the already delightful sight that much more decadent.

Of course I know why my dear boy, everyone who has the privilege to be collected in your orbit knows why. But I want to hear that anger laced tone of yours continue this discussion of ours. To speak those words that are clinging to your vocal cords with strength and has you

wearing this newly made suit of yours, that I want nothing more than to see ripped to shreds. So that you have no other choice, but to face this situation with nothing, but what you really are. We have not danced like this in sometime and I will not let you out of my grasp anytime soon. It's bad enough you decided to hide yourself up there instead of taking the chance to be down here where we can be seen on equal grounds.

"Perhaps I do, or perhaps you are making your own assumptions." Hannibal said as he waited for Will to strike at him once again, but as he stared up at him Hannibal also noticed that once bright burning anger slowly diminishing. Clear that Will did not have the energy yet, to keep feeding that anger and defensiveness.

"I'm not assuming anything Doctor, you and the rest of the Bureau know why it's going to be hell for me to get up on that stand." Will retorted while he gestured with one of his hands, though the fire in his eyes were dying the anger in her words were still strong, which pleased the other.

"That's why I believe it would be best for you to describe why it will be hell as you so elegantly put it, for you to step on the stand," Hannibal said his own voice cool and calm a stark contrast to Will's, away to make it seem that he was going to attempt to smother that fire, but in reality, he wanted to feed it and let it grow. "That way you can be more prepared." He said as he perched himself on the edge of his desk with his hands clasped in front of him.

"That's what I've been doing in my free time." Will said off handedly as he began to turn away from the railing, though one of his hands still clasped at the metal.

"So I've been told." Hannibal breathed out as a slight form of disappointment coated in his chest as he watched as Will showed signs of turning away from him again, the thought of climbing up there had crossed his mind once or twice. In order to corner the flighty man, to trap him so he had no other choice, but to lash out.

"Let me guess Jack and Alana have been contacting you," Will said with bitterness infused in his tone. "Didn't like what came back from the shop and wanted to return it to sender." He said as he slowly began to walk along the railing, no longer looking down at Hannibal. "You would think they'd be happy I came back at all." He commented his face turned to the ceiling for a few moments before lowering his head and he turned his attention to something else.

"Is it wrong for them to be worried about your wellbeing," Hannibal slowly tilted his head, "to have people care about how you are feeling after the no doubt shattering circumstances that have fallen upon you." He stated with the right amount of well preformed concern that mixed beautifully with the guilt he had already laid out. All to help push things in the direction he wanted them to, taking his rightful place as the lead in their dance. Will let out a hesitant sigh and began to rub the back of his neck, clear he was once again battling with his own thoughts. After a few long-waited minutes to where the only sound was the crackling of the fire Hannibal had made in order to coax Will to stay on the ground and in one place, but sadly that plan did not work out in his favor. Will had still made his way up to the upper half of his office.

"No it's not wrong I guess, but."

“You thought this new constructed version of yourself would be enough to satisfy their curiosity of how you are handling things and their new found hunger now that the trial is so close.” Hannibal said easily taking over the conversation once more and wasn’t that surprised when Will didn’t put up that much a fight. “How do you honestly feel with the trail being so close and seeing Miss. Rhettford again?” Hannibal asked changing the subject to focus more on the still broken heart that Will had guarded with barbwire. He watched as the other took in the question, his eyes slightly going unfocused and body fighting not to go ridged, to not freeze under the spot light that tried to break down more of his new barriers. He was tempted to slip on that new suit for Hannibal, to act how he acted with others whenever they brought up Miranda around him. But he held back, the suit wasn’t ready to deal with Hannibal’s scrutinizing eyes and endless picking, it barely got him through the day. Will had to rethink his approach to this question.

To be honest with himself, Will didn’t really know how he felt about the whole situation, it was an odd cumulations of different emotions that either fed off each other or starved one another. It left him feeling like he was on a balancing act of either feeling hollow or overflowing, never finding a comfortable stance to stay in. He was honestly surprised he managed to form an appearance with the two weeks he was given, something he had thought that would keep the prying minds at bay. But that clearly did not work, he guessed he acted too custom made for their liking. Will thought for a split second he could take that idea as a twisted complement, them preferring how he actually was compared to, he really couldn’t call it new, because it wasn’t new. It was still his own traits, he just turned the setting up to maximum, something he wondered if he should have done a while ago that way what he was currently feeling could have been avoided.

Letting Miranda so far in and letting her plant her seeds into his mind, in his heart. He and her fed and cared for them until they started to blossom on their own. Now that garden was abandoned, it’s gate left open and waiting for them to come back to resume what they had started. But that was no longer a possibility, there were no longer any caretakers to watch over them and give them the care they needed. To monitor their growth and trim back what threatened to go wild as they brought life to the garden that Will never thought could exist inside of him. Now though what was left inside was decaying right before his eyes, life was slowly fading from something that held such a perfect promise and Will could not find it in himself to care. He found part of himself welcoming the fact that nature was taking over and the garden was decomposing, because that ment it would no longer be around to pester him on one of the largest mistakes he had ever made.

“Rotting.” Will finally answered, not rotten, but rotting. His voice was hollow his eyes down cast as he waited for Hannibal’s response. But it never came, silence hung in the air and Will knew he had to keep going, he had let Lecter lead the conversation for some time, guide it to where he wanted it to go and now it was his turn. To explain what he had ment and take over guiding this conversation, even though a part of his mind knew this was false. Lecter was just giving him the moment as a way to hide the control he obviously had, gave the impression of stepping back and giving him room to continue. Will had half the mind to stop right there and let his word go without a follow up, to deprive the man of a full answer, but he knew that wouldn’t get him very far in the long run. That Lecter would try and pull it out of him, force his jaw to unhinge and reach down his throat, grab what he ment and remove it from his being like a still developing tumor.

Will took the chance and glanced down at the bottom floor, where he knew Lecter would be. Waiting there, dissecting eyes staring up at him, waiting for the rest of his words to fall upon him like a follower waiting for a bestowed gift from a deity that Will knew the man did not believe in. It made him feel like a false god, with a blind follower, who simply did not understand what it was that they were putting their faith in. It had him tightening his grip on the railing slightly, to feel the heat of his palm seep into the cool of the railing. Will took a deep breath through his nose as he felt himself prepare for pushing the rest of his statement out of him. With each stretch of his chest and expansion of his lungs he felt his reasoning uncling itself from himself, losing its grip and make its way to his vocal cords, then to his mouth where it readied itself for the outside world.

"The inside of me is rotting away the more time moves forward to the trial date, to seeing *her* again," Hannibal did not miss how the pronoun slipped past his lips with enough detest in it that it sent a cool pleasurable chill down the psychiatrist's spine and a need to hear it all over again. "The closer the day gets the more I feel myself rot away, I don't know how much is going to be left behind or if anything will be at this point. Something is decaying inside of me and leaving behind instability." He finished as he felt the emptiness in his chest left behind. He looked down at Lecter again and waited for his response.

"The rotting that you are experiencing," Hannibal breathed out as he slowly stood up from where he was perched and slid his hands in his pockets. "Are the feelings you've harbored for Miss. Rhettford. They are dying, decaying as we speak, not all of you is facing this fate, just the aspect that was made by Miss. Rhettford."

"Come Monday I don't think anything will be left, just a husk to be taken by the first strong wind that comes by." Will breathed out turning his attention away yet again and this time Hannibal knew it was going to be a fight to get it back.

"Guess we'll only know when Monday comes."

The courthouse, a singular building that Will felt a distain for, even when he was just a police officer back in New Orleans. When it was rare for him to set foot in the imposing building, it still made his skin prickle and had him grinding his teeth. Will could never pinpoint the real reason why he felt this way towards courthouses, perhaps it was the people who roamed the halls. The high-priced defense attorneys, who were not afraid to spill some blood or trample over people to win a case. Even when the person they were defending was clearly guilty; as long as they paid who cared about the verdict. Maybe it was the prosecutors who also roamed the halls, who always seemed to believe that they were above the agents, he had met some that actually believed that the agents served them instead of the law as a whole. Not all of them were bad, some actually cared about serving justice, but those were a few and far in between. Then there were the judges if it wasn't the lawyers or prosecutors that got under his skin, it was them, with their holeyer than thou attitude that could compete with Lecter's. How they sometimes stared down at the prosecutors and the agents, as if they ruled the land and, in some ways, Will knew they technically did. But it was their attitude about it that always rubbed him the wrong way.

Now he found himself once again in the courthouse that could swallow the one back in New Orleans whole, waiting for the trial to start. He sat at a loan bench his leg slightly bouncing

thanks to his anxiety mixed with agitation, as he noticed group after group of people all dressed in well paid for suits walking up and down the corridors. All stuck in their own worlds, with either phones pressed to their ears to the point of merging, or talking with either a client or associate. It added to the already aggravating noise that filled the large building, Will never understood how such a large building could be filled with so much noise and why it always found him to assault his somewhat sensitive ears with. The sound of endless talking, heels hitting the always pristine floors, doors opening and closing, it always found him and made sure to dig under his skin. Will took a deep breath and ran his hand though his once well maintain hair, he knew how to appear in court all trim and proper, appear the way he did not actually feel. On the outside he could pass off as held together when on the inside he was falling apart.

“Hey.” Came a soothing voice that drew Will out if his spiral and had him raise his head. To see Alana standing in front of him with a soft understanding smile, that Will tried not to label as pity, but instead as caring.

“Oh, uh hi.” Will replied as he tried to control his anxious facial muscles as he slowly sat up, letting out a deep breath. Aligning his feelings so he could hold onto them better and not fall apart in front of Alana, or else that caring smile would turn to pity. “I’m guessing Jack called you down here?” Will knew it was an obvious question, but at the moment he felt his brain running both too fast and too slow to think of a proper response.

Alana didn’t answer him right away, she had a look that said she was mulling over his question, as if it needed to be picked apart, as she slightly rocked back and forth on her heels. A trait of hers that Will found himself enjoying, made the situation feel less heavy than it actually was. “No, Jack didn’t call me down here,” she tilted her head to the side, “I voluntarily came down here, because I knew my friend would need the support.” She spoke. “Now skootch over so I can sit down.” She added with a more standard smile paired with a soft playful tone as she stepped forward.

“Oh right sorry.” Will quickly apologized as he slid over on the bench to make room for her, room she gently took as she sat down next to him. Sitting at the right distance that could bring comfort, but still allow the man some semblance of space, Will took in another deep breath through his nose and ran a hand over his face. Not carrying that he bumped his glasses as he did so. “So are you going to be the first to ask me how I’m holding up, or are you going to leave it to someone else?” He asked with a monotone voice as he adjusted his glasses back.

Alana let out her own sigh. “Guess I get the honors of being the first.” She replied as she turned lightly to face him. “So, how are you holding up?” She asked as she reached over to place her hand on his shoulder and Will felt a little relieved when she didn’t comment how stiff it was.

“Well I told Lecter I felt like I was rotting.”

“Oh, so you did finally go and see him.” Alana commented her voice had a hint of surprise and a dash of relief in it. Not even acknowledging that he just told her that he felt like he was rotting from the inside out. But perhaps that was purposeful, didn’t want to feed his negativity, have it growing and consuming him.

“Yes, though he did not show it. I could tell he felt that same way you do right now.” Will replied as he leaned slightly forward and focused on the passerby instead of her, it made the conversation easier to walk through.

“Well like the rest of us, he was just worried about you that’s all.” Alana said as she moved her hand so it rested on his back. “Can you really blame him?” Will couldn’t help, but let out a short dry chuckle, which he knew that he had caught her off guard with.

“How often do you guys spend time together?” Will asked as he turned to look over to her, before she could take the question in any negative way he continued. “Because he basically said that same thing about you and Jack.” Alana let out a small chuckle at the comment and Will felt a little relieved that she took it the way he intended and not find offense in his words.

“Not as often as you make it sound,” she said after she finished her soft chuckle, “though we do talk a bit more than we use to.” Alana mussed, her face slightly perplexed as she considered her words and the story behind them. Will felt the urge to wave his hand in front of her face, just to test if she was still with him or lost in her own world. But she quickly blinked a few times and that seemed to have brought her back to him. “But that’s beside the point. I’m just glad you are resuming your, what did you two call them, conversations.” Alana said with a smile and it really had Will wondering how much time the two actually spent together and how often did he pop up in their conversations. It also had him weighing if that was a good or a bad thing that he was such a heavy topic for the two, his mind weighed on it being a bad thing.

“Yeah, well the only reason I did was because of today, that and Jack practically ordered me to start going back to them. Saying that they would help me get through this.” Will mumbled as he sat back up, feeling Alana’s warm touch slip off his back and once again his mind was split on either wanting that touch to stay and give him a sense of comfort and glad it was gone, not wanting to feel any warmth from anyone for a long time. Even if it was coming from a caring heart, his mind and body wasn’t quite ready for that. It still wanted to have those barriers up, to not let anyone in, to keep himself protected, and after his conversation with Lecter, those barriers needed more work done. It still ate at him that he let the doctor get to him so easily, how simply mentioning *her* had set him off, had him breaking through his own defenses that he stood behind simply to what, snap at the man. Respond the way Lecter wanted him to, it still set off a small flicker of frustration in him and he had to turn his mind’s attention away from that memory to put it out.

“You make it sound like that’s a bad thing, for him wanting you to receive some form of structure to help you through this.” Alana replied as she placed her hands in her lap with a small smile playing at her lips and tilted her slightly causing her hair to fall over her shoulders. As Will watched he couldn’t prevent the comparison forming in his mind, and suddenly his imagination was once again working against him. Slowly Alana began to shift like paint being dipped into water, her image swirled and took form of someone else. Instead of her sitting beside him with a carrying warm smile trying to convince him that Jack pushing him back into Lecter’s office was for his own good; a song and dance that he wished to stop being a part of, taking her form as the watercolors settled sat Miranda. Looking at him with her own inviting eyes and the smell of roasted cinnamon and heated citrus, that once painted

image of perfectly crisp leaves the color of the setting sun, filled the cool air in seconds. The once welcomed smell played at his senses, it made the image all too real as he continued to take in the unwanted sight that his unleashed imagination started to paint for him. Her captivating eyes, the phantom smell, all paired with her pristine smile that always held the right amount of warmth that reached out towards his chest. It started to become eerily real, at any moment Will expected this once perfect image to start talking to him and he wasn't sure if it would be Alana's voice or Miranda's to come out of that once very alluring mouth, from lips that Will could still feel the velvet touch of in the lonely dark of the night when his isolation became far too impactful, that not even his dogs could chase away. Suddenly the situation started to wrap itself around his mind and he could feel his heartbeat begin to pick up and he wasn't sure if his ribcage could hold the life-giving muscle in place.

"I need to get a drink." Will blurted out as he quickly stood up, taking Alana obviously by surprise and before she could make a reply to the sudden action Will was briskly walking off. Hands buried in his pockets, head ducked, and shoulders raised. All in order to help break through the always moving crowd of passerby, before being swallowed up by it. Leaving Alana sitting alone on the bench, trying to understand what had suddenly happened to him.

Get a grip, get a grip, get a grip! Will kept repeating to himself as he battled through the crowd and made his way to the thankfully unoccupied water fountain. His throat threatening to close on him the whole time and his mouth going dry. *You're just tired that's it, with the trial, Alana's attempt at comfort and that whirled wind of a session with Lecter.* He thought as he pressed the side button of the water fountain and watched as the welcoming water came out. *You just need to calm down for a moment.* The water all though it helped open his throat and wash away the unwanted dryness of his mouth, did not stop his clustered thoughts. *Take a moment and fix those barriers you worked so hard on, keep your imagination in check, you know it likes to run wild when you are like this. Now is not the time to let this happen.* He tried to reason with himself as he tried put his mind back together, go back to that state he was in before Alana had joined him on the bench. Before she tried to open himself back up for her to see behind his mask. *Just breath and slip back into place, the trial will come they will call you, you will answer the questions, state the facts. Then no more of this, you'll go back to your home repair yourself and drop back into the rushing stream of life. Let it drag you through current and before you know it, you'll be called for another case. Everything will fall back into place. No Miranda, no more questions of how I'm holding up, nothing but the...* Will jumped slightly when he felt a hand press onto his shoulder, causing him to almost choke on the over filtrated water he was drinking that coated his tongue with an odd chemical like taste that wasn't enough to turn him away from taking another drink if he found need for one. He quickly straightened and turned around to see who it was. Only to see Jack standing right behind him, taking a step back once he realized he had startled the other man and dropped his hand.

"Didn't mean to startle you." Jack calmly explained as he raised his hand slightly in defense before he stopped after he deemed that he had given the agent enough space. Will stood straight up and wiped his mouth off. He didn't say a word, just made a sound acknowledging the closes thing to an apology he was going to get from the man, as he turned around to fully face him. "I want to know how you are going to handle this, being in there, on the stand, in front of Miss. Rhettford." Jack said cutting straight to the point as always and like always Will felt grateful, he wasn't ready to deal with a walk around conversation at the moment.

“I’m not going to fall apart Jack.” Will stated, not in the mood to walk through the conversation and just jump straight to what the man wanted to hear from him. Confirming that he could hold himself together through all this. Jack let out a heavy sigh clear he did not believe Will for a second, but when did he ever fully believe him about his mental health. If he had then Will wouldn’t be seeing Lecter every week sometimes twice.

“You say that now, but let’s face it, that is going to change once you enter that courtroom and you are called to the stand. Where you’ll be questioned not only about the case, but your relationship with her.” Will couldn’t stop himself from rolling his eyes and crossing his arms. An attempt to shield himself in a way to show that he wasn’t going to let any of that affect him. Not in the way that others kept insisting he would. “You were extremely close to her Will,” Jack continued voice shifting to a tone that could nail his statement down into the others mind and Will flicked his eyes back over to Jack. Showing that he was paying attention, because he finally said something Will couldn’t simply dismiss. “We all know you don’t like being picked apart, especially when it starts to hit close to home. You lash out and now you are going to be put in a place where you are going to be forced to sit there and take it.”

“I can take.” Will was cut off when Jack raised his hand to stop him from continuing to defend himself. With words that could not fully back up his claim, because in reality Will wasn’t sure if he could sit there and take what was going to happen. He always had a hard time sitting on the stand, where he felt like free game to be dissected at. To have his claims be dismissed or ripped apart, it was tough enough when he was called to defend the evidence, his thinking process, his sanity. To be questioned over the slightest detail, to have his mental stability laid out on the chopping block with the recently sharpened clever raised and ready to come down. Will found himself either a prosecutor’s wet dream or a nightmare, he was never in between. Now to throw in his personal relationship in that already poisonous stew, he might not be able to bite his tongue long enough.

“No I don’t believe you can.” Jack said his voice stern like his facial expression, clear that Will was ment to stand there and simply listen. Jack let out a heavy sigh as he pinched the bridge of his nose for a few seconds trying to control the frustration that Will could feel coming off of him, before he lowered his hand and relocated them on to his hips. “You are saying this now, but you haven’t stepped foot in that room, haven’t seen her yet.” Jack pointed out while Will felt his arms tighten as he kept them crossed over his chest. He knew Jack had a point, if Will could actually take it, was all speculations on his part. He believed if he kept saying he could, that he could survive this that he wouldn’t end up falling apart then it would actually happen. But the more he stood there the less he began to believe himself. “I called in Lecter.” Will opened his mouth to protest, that last thing he wanted was Lecter to be there. To see him take the stand, where he would have his ribcage forced open to reveal his cracked and chipped heart. Put on display like a broken piece of art. The man would take in the sight with greed and twisted satisfaction, for once Will would be forced to open up for over a dozen eyes and ears to feast upon. Where he could do nothing, but to let it, all happen, just sit there, and preform like a marionette with frayed strings that threaten to snap at any moment. When those stings did snap it would leave him to lie in a mass of motionless limbs and a broken soul, unable to move until someone came by and picked him up. Will would bet Lecter would be all too pleased to be that person, to stand over his broken body, Lecter’s

head tilting slightly to the right then left as he took in the pathetic display. Only after having his fill would he oh so generously bend down and pick the man up off the ground.

But before Will could voice his protest, Jack sent him a harden look and Will found himself closing his mouth and ducking his head slightly to the left avoiding looking the man in the face. Jack let out another deep sigh as he realized his strict no backing down behavior was only going to get two reactions out of Will, either fighting back; which Jack did not want, or retreating back into his mind; something Jack was trying to prevent.

"Listen Will," Jack continued his voice shifting away from harsh to something more of a concerned parent. "You are going to need the support and I want you to have it." Jack tilted his head in order to catch Will's eyes. Which worked because Will slowly looked back over to him and lifted his head slightly. "Do you understand where I am coming from?" He asked.

Will slowly nodded his head, causing a headache to dislodge itself and slowly begin to flower inside of his skull. *Great that's the last thing I need, this day already feels like walking up to Hell's gate, now all I need is the devil himself knocking against my skull.* Will thought with measured bitterness as he felt his hands itching to reach into his pocket to retrieve his aspirin, but he fought off that itch. *Not in front of Jack then that will just confirm that you need Lecter here.* He told himself as he laid his hand flat against his thigh. After a few seconds Will realized that Jack was still standing in front him, he connected the dots as fast as his throbbing mind would allow him. Will let out his own tired sigh of too cold air. "Yes, I understand where you are coming from."

Jack's dark eyes searched Will's face a few seconds, trying to pick any hidden emotions that the other was attempting to hold back. But it was clear through the man's eyes that Will wasn't hiding any of his emotions at the moment and he was going to take what Will said at face value. If not for Will, for himself in order to get through the next who knows how many hours this was going to take. "Good." He finally said with a slight nod. Before taking a step back with his hands on his hips and his eyes scanning the never still hall. "Listen all I need out of you now is your word that when you do take that stand you won't end up in contempt of court," Jack once again tilted his head, "can I have that?"

"You have my word that I'll play nice while I'm up there."

"Good, now if you excuse me, I was told that the D.A. wants to have chat with me before this gets going." Jack said with slight annoyance in his tone which Will could agree with. He felt the urge to tell the man good luck, but he held his tongue and simply gave a gesture of goodbye as he watched the man leave.

As soon as Jack was no longer in sight Will let out a heavy breath as he felt his body threaten to deflate on the spot. He lowered his head slightly, in order to get rid of some of the tension that was taking over his muscles and seeping into his bones. Like his headache and the idea that Lecter was going to appear at some point, the last thing he needed to deal with was stiffening muscles. It seemed to him that the list was growing larger and larger the more the day continued and it wasn't even noon hell it wasn't even nine o'clock yet and he was already regretting getting out of bed. But it wasn't like he was able to sleep that night anyway. For the days leading up to the trial Will found himself finding every excuse not to go to bed. It was no use to him at this point, he would just lay there either waiting for sleep to

come to him or end up falling into a void that left him far more tired than he had felt going to bed. It also had his body aching every time he got up the next morning and it had him wondering how long the human body could last without going to bed. But he never followed through with that intrusive thought either because he found it pointless to make his already damaged mind suffer or his body, simply in the end he gave out and he fell into the dark void of nothingness. It almost had him wishing for a dream or nightmare to rain havoc on his vulnerable mind, which was ironic since he used to pray for nights in the void.

Will took another heavy breath before he raised his head and his eyes were immediately caught and he felt his mind slowly focus heavily on who caught his attention. Making her way through the crowd with her head slightly tucked down and shoulders hunched was Brittney. Will took in her appearance and a tidle wave of sympathy over took his mind, washing away the agitation and anxiety that once coated it. He couldn't stop it even if he tried as he watched the young lady make her way to the designated courtroom. There were dark rings under her large eyes; eyes that stared off into nothing, she walked as if her mind was set on autopilot while also being very aware of what was going on around her. As though it expected for her to get attacked by anyone who so much as looked at her. Now she faced the same fate as him, she was going to put on that stand and be made to open herself up for the world to see, to be turned into a victim of Miranda's all over again. Will was somewhat certain that he was going to survive the chest opening, he couldn't say the same thing for the young woman. She had suffered far worse than he had in his own mind, being made the scapegoat, having the world turn on her. While she desperately sung out her innocents only for her melody to fall on deaf ears. Now she was forced to perform all over again into ears that were all too willing to listen to her song. All because they were made the fool and were now trying to save face. After they had forced an innocent lamb to wear the fur of a wolf.

Will found himself moving away from the water fountain as he began to follow after the young woman. He did not completely figure out why his feet were moving towards her, why his mind wasn't giving itself away to the reason why he needed to catch up to her. Before she disappeared completely into the crowd. Perhaps it was because though he would never admit to this himself, while others painted him it that light. He too was a victim of Miranda, used by her like how she used Brittney and that's why he found himself suddenly drawn to the broken woman. Because he too was broken and left to pick up his pieces and while he had gathered as much of his and put them back into places or tried to at least to the point that he could appear whole to the concerned eye. Brittney still walked around completely broken and unable to pick herself up, unable to slide her pieces back into their rightful slots. Perhaps he could help her with that, but the more he thought of that idea the more he realized his feet began to slow down and the further Brittney became. *Let her go, you can't help her.* He thought to himself as he fully stopped himself. *You could barely save yourself from all this, you'll just end up making it far worse for the poor girl. With your tainted hands that will no doubt corrupt those pieces as soon as you touched them or break them further to the point they no longer exist. It'll be best if you keep to yourself like you have been doing and let her deal with this on her own.* Will found himself listening to his thoughts as he slid his hands into his dress pants pockets and watched as Brittney was consumed by the crowd.

Will stood there for a second as others walked past him, not quite sure what to do with himself at the moment. He felt confused, no longer did he feel agitated or anxious, just the simple emotion of lost. As if he needed someone to point in the direction he should be taking

in the sea of people and wave of emotions that threatened to drown his mind. A mind that decided to lead him astray at the moment as he found becoming lost at the sudden whirlwind that was taking place, left to stand motionless as it tried to straighten itself out. He could feel a fuzz like sensation slowly began to trap his mind, it gave him the sensation of weightlessness, his mind was drifting away. That was how it decided to handle itself at the moment, instead of shutting down completely it was coating itself in a barrier that would preserve itself as he fought through this time. Will felt his mind slipping into that comfortable fuzz and though a part of him wanted to stop it from happening, wanted to stay present for what awaited him, another part wouldn't allow that to happen. It was tired of being present, of handling those emotions that made his body and mind their own wreaking yard, it wanted his awareness to be turned off for the time being. To have him switch over onto autopilot much like Brittney had done and Will soon let that side begin to win. It would be easier on himself and the rest of them if he simply switched off.

A very aggressive shove collided with his shoulder, quickly taking him off guard and it caused him to stumble with his legs unable to straighten out properly as he tried to catch his balance so he wouldn't end up face planting onto the well waxed floor. As he prepared for that to happen, because of course his brain had to refocus itself, escaping the enticing fuzz and it scrambled to put in the right inputs to save himself. But Will found himself being stopped from the embarrassment and slight painful landing that awaited him by a very strong hand firmly pressed on his chest paired with a tight grip on his forearm, keeping him from meeting that fate. It also had him reliving this strange case of déjà vu that he could not place for a second until he felt the fingers that held onto his forearm slightly tighten and it helped bring his mind back into focus as he stared down at the floor.

"Are you alright Will?" Came a very familiar rich voice and Will could feel his heart leap into his throat and for a second, he questioned if it was really wrong to rather be face first on the floor than where he was at the moment. Will flicked his eyes to the side, only to be met with a very distinct red and black plaid suit. Will's eyes traveled up slightly more to confirm to his still slightly fuzzed coated mind who had their hands on him. There Hannibal Lecter stood holding onto his right forearm and his hand pressed against his chest. Hannibal's head was tilted ever so slightly to the side while his eyes searched for any form of a reaction from him. Suddenly Will felt *it* again as he met with those sharp eyes and felt the heat of Hannibal's touch seep passed his blazer, his dress shirt, and into his skin. The illusive flicker that that haunted his ribcage, that he still could not put a label on. Like before it decided to show up at one of the most unwanted of times and it had his heart beating hard, it made Will wonder if Hannibal could feel his heartbeat while he had his palm secured against his chest. That thought alone, if his heart wasn't already beating like a new drum, it was now.

Will began to blink in rapid succession as he quickly went to straighten himself out, taking a slight step back so Hannibal's hand wasn't pressed against his chest, but he could not step out of the grip the man had on his forearm.

"Uh yeah I'm fine." Will answered his voice a mixture of a mumble and fluster as he ran his hand over his shirt a few times. To give the impression of trying to fix his outfit, while in reality he was trying to get rid of the flicker in his chest and the phantom warmth that lingered from Hannibal's touch. He looked over at the doctor, as he hoped he came off as somewhat convincing with his statement as he slowly stopped running his hand over his shirt.

But it was clear Hannibal did not but what he was selling, his eyes creased slightly as he searched for another more realistic reaction from the man, his grip still firm on Will's arm. As though he was trying to prevent the man from taking off on him like a startled animal. Will's eyes bounced around the other's face for a few moments as he tried to put together a sentence that would have Hannibal releasing his grip while it also put his mind at ease, that he wasn't going to go hide somewhere in the large building until the trial stated. "I was just lost in my thoughts that's all." He finally settled with telling the truth, because he knew he wasn't completely up to backing up a lie.

"That is completely understandable," Hannibal responded as he slowly let go of Will's arm and Will could tell that a part of Hannibal really did not want to. That he wanted to keep Will grounded to his side in order to prevent him from taking off like he had done with Alana and Will knew unlike Alana, Hannibal would attempt to follow after him. "Though I would suggest if you were to get lost in your own mind that you would find a place that isn't in the middle of such a busy walk way." Hannibal continued as he looked around them and the bushel of people that kept going. Which was odd, because for a second Will had forgotten about the stream of people that flowed passed him and now Hannibal.

"You're probably right." Will breathed out as he was reminded of one of the agitations that was printed on his growing list. His eyes began to look around the constant flow and he could feel his irritation towards his surroundings begin to prick at his skin.

"Perhaps we should continue this conversation in a less active area." Hannibal supplied and Will found himself nodding his head before he took in all of Hannibal's suggestion. But it was enough for the man to lead him out of the bustling flow as Will found himself far too focused of ridding his mind of the enticing fuzz that still clung onto some parts of his mind. It had him speculating if it would be a bad idea to keep some of that fuzz around, maybe he could find a way to place it on certain aspects of his mind. That way he could get through this whole ordeal without completely loosing himself like he did that tragic night. Once again, he found himself caught up in his mind to acknowledge the new placement of one of Hannibal's hands as he was led out of the crowd and to a more favorable spot where it could just be the two of them. Where Hannibal could attempt to take advantage of Will's wounded heart some more, point things in his favor and have the man leaning onto him during this time. "This should be a more suitable area for one to get lost in their mind." Hannibal said as he came to a stop in a far-off section of the busy floor, near a large window that over looked the constant flow of cars that passed by the large building, with a few people who roamed the streets. Will made the note of how they looked like pestering ants from their height, he could find himself getting last just watching the skittering about their day. As they either walked past the building or towards it. "Wouldn't you agree?" Hannibal added as he looked more closely towards Will, he could tell right away that the man was starting to slip again, he was turning to take cover in his mind and that was something that Hannibal was not going to allow. "Will." He spoke in a firmer tone enough to push past the barrier that was clouding the others mind.

"Oh right sorry," Will blinked a few times as he realized what his mind was doing and quickly brought himself to focus on his surroundings once more. "Yes, this place is much more preferable than back." Will didn't finish his sentence he just loosely gestured back to the moving crowds.

“Good to know that you agree,” Hannibal breathed out not taking his eyes off the empath, “now I believe we should discuss what is about to take place in a few minutes.” Will let out a deep breath of discomfort, he should have seen this conversation coming a mile away, but his mind was too preoccupied with the wave of emotions and then the entrapping fuzz, it had left him blind.

“I already informed Jack that I’ll behave on the stand,” Will gave Hannibal a side glance, “I didn’t think I needed to inform you as well,” Will slowly turned to the other his hands in his pockets, “but since you are here on Jack’s request, I guess I have no other choice.” The spike of aggravation hidden in his tone and tied together with a sharpen tongue had Hannibal’s eyebrow slightly twitch in amusement intwine with intrigue. He had expected nearly hoped to see this attitude return to Will, he wouldn’t have it any other way if he was completely honest. It just proved that the other was returning back to his old self and soon it would be himself that would have claim to change the man once more. To shape him into his true from the he had kept hidden even from his own self.

“Well though I am here on Jack’s request, my true reason is to make sure you are prepared for the obstacle that awaits you once you enter that court room.” Will let out another deep breath clear he was growing tired of the same sentence only dressed in different words.

“I don’t see why everyone seemed so fixated on how I will be, the way I see it. I’m just going to go up on that stand and answer the questions that are thrown at me and try not to bite at the fingers that prob.” Will responded, hoping if he began to push back more than people would step back.

“You are looking at this as though it is another case, yet back in my office you grew quite hostile when I brought up the same form of seeing it.” Hannibal easily pointed out, finding rich amusement when Will seem to lower his defensive posture in mere seconds as his own logic was attacked.

“Perhaps I finally decided to take some unspoken advice and do just that, look at this as any other case.” Hannibal took a slight step forward as he slid his hands into his pockets, the unspoken advice that Will recalled was never actually there, it was something his mind had conjured up in its attempt at self-preservation. Hannibal only spoke of this being any other case, was a means to get the man to open up to him. To bare his teeth and perhaps give a glimpse of the wounded heart that beats behind a strong barrier. Now though it seemed all that has come back around to bite him in some way and it damaged that once rich amusement he was feeling not seconds prior.

“Though that might seem like a wise and tempting idea at the moment, what’s to say that your mind will allow you to follow through with that?” Hannibal asked as he tilted his head slightly ready to pick apart even the most miniscule reaction from Will. “What’s to say you will be able to hold on to that strategy and not succumb to the more fragile parts of your mind as soon as this is all over with.”

“It will follow through; I won’t allow it to be any other way.” Will said his voice though the tone was level the aggression in it was a bit higher. Giving away what he was truly feeling and the hardness in his stare helped push that idea even further. But Hannibal also notice a slight crack in that stare, it was clear not all of Will was there to hold forth that anger that was

boiling inside of him. Hannibal couldn't help, but see the pity in that, because he thought for sure that Will's frustration and anger towards this whole ordeal would set him back onto the path that Hannibal had laid out for him. Yet it was clear that Will had started to wonder once again and it had Hannibal's mind questioning if he could coax the other back. Before Hannibal could think of something to respond with that might make those cracks worse, he was interrupted by the loud buzz of a cellphone and since he did not feel it, it only made sense that it came from Will. Who directed that broken anger towards his pocket and pulled out his cellphone and quickly checked it. "It's Alana letting me know that the trial is about to begin." Will mumbled as he slipped his phone back into his pocket.

"Oh, Alana is here?"

Will nodded his head as he began to look towards the still consistent river of suits. "Yeah, she wanted to show her support," he turned to look at Hannibal, "Make sure I had someone to lean on, you could say. When all," Will gestured vaguely with his hand, "is over with."

"That is very thoughtful of her." Hannibal said as he had to force himself to make a small smile. Once again fighting down the possessive beast that could sense when it was getting close to finally being able to sink its teeth and claws into the man in front of it. Only to have the chain that held it be pulled back when another challenged it.

"The more the merrier as the saying goes." Will breathed not turning back towards Hannibal. "All trying to keep the unstable stable in a way to keep their own pity from tainting their hearts and moving their thoughts." Will said as he continued to look away. "Better get this all over with and put it as far behind me as possible." Hannibal could tell the last sentence wasn't pointed towards himself, but more of Will trying to convince his own self.

"Yes, we better head over to the courtroom." Hannibal stated and he barely had half that sentence out before Will began to walk towards the designated room, hands stuffed in his pockets and shoulders already in a defensive stance. Hannibal knew that this was going to be a show worth watching.

As Will stood in front of the large imposing doors that led into where the world of balance took place he wondered if it was too late to fake an illness, he could definitely pull it off. Say he had gotten sick or knew that this was going to be all too much for himself to handle. That lie alone would have Alana in his corner. It wasn't like he was really needed on the stand; the evidence alone would be enough to put Miranda behind bars that along with her confession. The only reason he was going to be called was to put on more nail in the coffin, he wasn't needed, he was just going to be put on display to help drive the case home. With one more sense of reassurance and the temptation of that fuzz slowly crawling over his brain and coating his thoughts, Will pushed passed the two large doors. His eyes immediately focusing on the imposing Judge's stand as he made his way to an appropriate spot for him to sit at while he endured what was about to take place. Which was in the middle and near the wall, he knew if he hid in the corner that would rise the already high gossip that circled him, bring out either dark intrigue from others or dripping pity from some. If he sat up front the same could be said, but more of dark intrigue and poisonous chatter would form along with misleading questions on why he decided to sit up front so close to where the show would be performed, so close to *her*. At least if he sat in the corner in the back then people would

understand the distance, but then there would come the unwanted pity that he often had to dodge like virus. Instead of facing those two outcomes he decided to bridge the gap and sit in the middle, but still have the unmovable security of the wall to help himself in some sense. Will took his seat and watched as Hannibal did the same through his peripheral, unlike him the man moved with calculation disguised as everyday movements, that set him above the rest. Not saying a word and it gave Will the opportunity to let that slow moving fuzz to fully claim his mind in preparation.

The sound of doors being opened, the drop of already low voices and the sudden shift in the air as if it iced over. It all came together to agitate the once peaceful fuzz so it was not performing the way it promised. It had Will shift inside himself as he begrudgingly returned to the present. As he followed the sound and the odd pull of the shift. Something familiar began to stir inside of him as he felt a pull tugging inside of him and it had Will looking past Hannibal, past the rest who were called upon and his vision focused on the far door. Where the distinct sound of sharp expensive heels hit the polished floors sang out, steps that matched with his own hard beating heart. There she stood, the Black Widow. Dressed in a sharp three-piece notched lapel suit that hugged her body like a second skin, it was the same color of the blood she once bathed in, paired with a black dress shirt to help break up that deadly sea. Her makeup was applied to in hance her already striking beauty, with lips painted in the exact same color as her suit, made to catch and hold attention of those around her. One would not believe for a single second that she had spent weeks locked behind bars waiting for this day to happen, unlike Brittney who had served a lesser time and the young woman looked as though she was a walking husk. It proved deeply how different the two were and how strong Miranda was.

Will could not look away as she walked into the courtroom with an aura that made her seem as if she was above all. Her sharp gaze prowled across the courtroom, as she took in those who watched her in complete silence and slowly her eyes landed on him. Will felt his heart threaten to stop when he found himself locking eyes with her once again and everything around him fell away, he felt it was simply him and her in the room. No one else was there, as they stared into one another eyes. Her eyes though were once cold and calculated soon began to fill with a soft warmth just like when they were together, alone enjoying each other's presence. Before the hard unforgiving truth was unmasked and ruined the image for the both of them. They stared deeply at one another, their eyes locked and so was part of Will's mind as he watched as she made her way over to the defense table, their eyes never leaving one another. Even when she sat down, she still held a form of elegance and sophistication that others wished that they could pull off. Even when she broke the trapping eye contact that held onto Will with an iron grip, Will found himself unable to pull himself away from her. His mind began to fill with questions. All lining up to the same one, how could she be so calm and collected? She was about to be sentenced to a life trapped like those she had caught in her web, but unlike them there was no chance of escaping the adhesive clutches. Yet there she sat as though she was in a business meeting and not a murder sentence. Will slowly began to realize as he felt his hands grab onto his pants legs, gripping tightly at the fabric, he needed to see some form of a reaction out of Miranda. Something to show she held a different emotion that she was showing the world. He didn't fully understand why he needed this, maybe to see a more human side of her at this moment, that she wasn't just a cold blood calculating killer that he felt a deep feeling for. But the more he tried to summon those feelings into fruition,

the more it brought out his own, ones he tried so hard to lock away for this trial. That way he could preserve himself.

“The first witness I’d like to call to the stand is special agent Will Graham.” Called the demanding voice of the prosecutor, enough to cut through the new formed lock that trapped Will’s mind. As he was pulled back to his surroundings as he realized he was just called to have himself flayed open and put on displayed. Will rose to his feet and as he did that, he felt eyes immediately latch onto him, he was thankful for the callus he had built over the years, so the sudden attack did little to halt his action. But it didn’t mean he still did not feel the weight that those eyes held for him as he made his way to the isle. The only sound that now filled the large courtroom was the sound of his footsteps and the soft whispers that those who spoke believed he could not hear. Will knew what those whispers were built on what words they spoke and like the eyes, he had years to build a form of armor to protect himself from them. Yet he could feel some damage form as he continued down the suddenly long isle, his muscle felt weighed down, it reminded him of times when he would run in his nightmares. When his limbs either refused to listen to the simple command or as if there was some hinderance to the movements. As he walked Will also felt his heartbeat become louder and apparent with each step he took. He tried his best to keep his mind focused, as he attempted to predict what questions they were going to cut him with and how he would respond to them.

While he moved it felt as though time itself began to slow, the constant stream that always seemed to flow so easily for others, began to freeze and turn onto thick molasses. He pushed past the barrier gate and towards the Judge’s stand where an older woman sat in her well pressed robe, with neatly cut silver hair and a neutral expression. Even though she was the judge, she did not have the judgmental stare in her hazel eyes that a lot of those in the very room did, it helped ease some of the tension that Will was feeling as he walked towards the witness stand. With every footstep he made the more he felt those eyes burying in on him. It had his defensives rising in a rate that struggled to keep up with the amount out pressure. Will barely stepped on the stand, where he was put on displayed, he knew this was going to be the last time he was going to be seen as whole, before he was taken apart. When he was approached by the bailiff, a woman with her orang hair pulled tightly in a bun and the same neutral expression as the judge. But she held the look that softly spoke of how like everyone here that she did not want to be here and Will agreed with her.

“Put your hand on the bible Sir.” The woman guided as she held out a thick black bible in front of him, it’s title golden and shined brightly under the cold lights. Will nodded his head to show he was listening before he placed his hand on the not so surprisingly cold leather of the book. “Now do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so helps you God?” She asked in a quick overly said pace, her voice somewhat monotone as she looked at him, expecting him to say what everyone says when asked this.

“Yes.”

“Good you may be seated.” She responded and Will followed the order, when he sat down, he fully took on the situation that was laid before him. The rows of people sitting on the benches, some faces he recognized. He spotted Brittney, along with Nichol, who for the few times they had interacted was wearing less vibrant colors and a less eye-catching outfit, she

wore a simple black suit and he noticed how she took out her piercing. The rest of those who sat around them he did not recognize, but he did recognize the look in their eyes, they looked at him as though he was an animal at the zoo and he felt those looks begin to bury under his skin once more. Causing him to quickly advert his gaze as he went to look over at the prosecutor, a slim man who seemed like he had the attitude that he walked on water. Will knew the type, the kind of man who believed since he was a prosecutor that the law enforcement was below him, if his attitude didn't give it way it was the expensive leather shoes and the watch he kept adjusting on his wrist. Will found himself unable to keep looking at him, before he realized it, he felt his eyes slowly drifting over towards Miranda and how he wished he was able to stop them. Because as he looked over at her, he once again fell into her trap. Locked into those captivating eyes and that subtle smile. The same look she would often share with him while they shared their most domestic moments together. Will tried to push that growing tumor of a thought away, he tried to force his mind somewhere else, but the only place it wanted to be was with Miranda. As she sat there across the courtroom her hands intertwin together as they sat on the table, her back perfectly straight and as they locked eyes Will had caught something. A small flicker of a dark light playing underneath as if mocking him as it hid away again. But he knew what that was, he had seen it fully before when he stood on the other side of the one-way glass of the interrogation room.

Where he came face to face with the Black Widow for the first time as she sat there behind the metal table with her hands cuffed and air cold around her. Unlike before where she acted a bit concerned and a little anxious, she now sat there completely still. She knew she was caught, she had nothing to hide, no reason to perform. She sat there calm and collected as she stared at the glass with sharp eyes and a slight amused expression hiding in plain sight. While she waited to be interrogated, Will stood there as still as she was. The hollowness he felt still fresh and growing throughout his body, he could feel a piece of himself no longer present as he watched her. Waiting for her to move, waiting for her to show some signs of a different emotions. But he knew that would never happen, because she did not feel scared, not worried, not even remorse for the lives she ended. She was caught and she accepted it. She could finally act without the disguise on and Will knew she wasn't going to hold back, she had no reason not to.

The whole time Will stood there in the silence and cold room, with his arms crossed fingers slightly twitching wanting to grab onto something and squeeze until either his fingers gave out or the object he was squeezing did. The charm bracelet burned in his pocket, like a piece of hot iron, pressing against his thigh leaving an invisible burn mark as it weighed down his pocket, the image flickered in his mind, along with the image of him tossing it in a fire just to watch it melt away. A single thought that kept replaying in his shattering mind that attempted to repair itself either far too quickly, or rather slowly as though it did not know what it wanted. To either be careful and make sure everything healed properly, be meticulous in the repair or skim all over that and get everything back together so he could move on. The one thought kept appearing inside of his under-construction mind. *How could I have been so blind?* The door to the interrogation room opened, but Will nor Miranda made an attempt to turn their attention towards who just walked in. As they continued to stare at one another and it had Will wondering if she knew that he was on the other side of the glass.

"Well it seems we have a case of déjà vu here don't you think Miss. Rhettford." Came Jack's voice as he walked into view, this time no case file in his hands. Though his voice wasn't as

heavy as it was the last time, it still held some weight of authority and determination built on confirmation. Miranda looked away from the glass and over towards the man was he made his way over to his seat, a small amused smile playing at her lips. The first sign of emotions she had shown since being left in the room.

“It seems you are quite correct Crawford,” Miranda said her voice sounded as though they were about to discuss the weather more than what was going to happen next as her eyes looked down at her cuffed wrist. “But unlike last time it seems you have gathered far more ammunition to keep me down. I guess my simple scapegoat won’t get me out of these any time soon.” A smirk played at her lips as she turned her sharp eyes back to Jack as he fully sat down.

“No and for your information Miss. Wilts is being processed for release as we speak.” Jack responded as he adjusted himself in his seat.

“It must really upset you that at one point you actually had the Black Widow in your grip and a simple DNA test was enough for you to release the lock on the cage and let her go.” Miranda said as she leaned forward slightly as she found a way to dig under the others skin and hoped he find irritation with it.

“But here she is back in my grasp and this time I don’t intend to let her go, not when there is a much stronger lock on the cage.” Miranda’s eyes narrowed slightly as she realized her words barely moved Jack the way she wanted.

“So you have, congratulation,” she breathed out with slight annoyance as she slowly leaned back in her chair going as far as the restraints allowed her. “If that is the case and your cage is so expertly locked why exactly have you brought me back here?” She asked as she looked around the room with slight boredom, before looking back at Jack waiting for him to answer. Jack let out his own breath as he followed her movements as he too leaned back in his chair. But to show that he wasn’t trapped like she was, he slung one of his arms over the back of the chair. In order to dig into the slight wound and help crack her open.

“It’s just procedure and to gather more information that could have been looked over.”

“Oh so you just want my help to feed that still gnawing hunger of yours, fill in the blatant holes left behind that your little helpers couldn’t figure out.” Her eyes narrowed slightly. “Perhaps they’re having trouble without their key *member*.” Will caught the implication and it struck him like a pebble, it didn’t exactly hurt, but he still felt the impact from it.

“All I need is for you to answer some questions then we can proceed.” Jack replied smoothly clear he wasn’t going to step into any of the traps that Miranda was laying out, wasn’t going to allow her to get under his skin, find the buttons to push. He knew how to handle himself in these situations and after the run around he was not going to take the risk of letting his emotions lead the interrogation.

“Alright, what exactly do you need to know that your little profile won’t already tell you.” Miranda said as she crossed her legs and straightened herself slightly.

“Let’s see, what I am trying to understand is the why,” Jack said as he leaned forward onto the table. “You’re a successful business woman, you practically built yourself an empire,” Jack tilted his head ever so slightly. “What could have caused such a drastic turn in your life?” A simple question with enough parental disappointment to help cause the words to sting, but instead of causing the intended effect of having Miranda question herself and feel that negative weight of the disappointment. It all seemed to have the opposite effect on her. Miranda let out an amused chuckle as she slightly shook her head. The chuckle sent both a small sting of cold down Will’s spine and a tingle of curiosity into his mind that had him anticipating her answer. Miranda easily composed herself in a split second as she raised her neat eyebrow.

“What exactly do you want to hear from me? Some sad backstory about, how mommy never loved me and step daddy touched me funny and that’s why I have a distain for men in power?” She said in a mocked voice before she rolled her eyes and leaned back in her chair. “Please I’m not that pathetic.” Her voice had a hint of annoyance as she turned her head to look elsewhere clear she was not entertained by the question and the expected answer to give. Will took a slightly step forward closer to the glass. This was a side to Miranda he had never seen; her true self was emerging and just like the mask she wore around him. This version of her was drawing him in as well, Will found himself even more intrigue to see her come out. Jack let out a sigh and shook his head slightly, before focusing his eyes on her.

“Alright then you tell me, why these men.” Miranda’s smirk returned as she readied herself to answer the questioned, pleased to give her reason. To sing her true siren song for those around.

“You know how hard it was for me to get to where I am? The hurtles I had to go over, the back breaking work I had to do.” Will could hear the shift in her tone as it grew shaper with each word and her eyes grew darker. The Black Widow was fully coming out by the second. “I had to work my ass off to get where I am with no short cuts or hands out. While these pigs were handed everything, they ever wanted without a second thought,” Her eyes and voice calmed down as she searched Jacks expression. “I thought it would only be right to show those men that just because they believe they owned the world they were mortal just like the rest of us,” Miranda let out a little scoff. “Even comparing them to the rest of us would be too good for them, in my own opinion they all had it coming.” Miranda added as she looked down at her nails. “It was quite easy doing it to,” Her eyes focused on Jack, “all I had to do was stroke that overly engorged ego of theirs and they were putty in my hands.” She shook her head. “In the end though they ment nothing to me, those men all they really were, were segregates, helped fulfill a craving that had be lingering on my tongue since the first time I stepped foot into such a cut throat world and told to lay down and be nice in order to survive.”

“You still took the lives of four men.” Jack pointed out in a cool tone as if that could bring any guilt out of Miranda.

You’re trying to find guilt where there is none Jack. She doesn’t feel any more guilty than when someone steps on a cockroach. You won’t find remorse or guilt anywhere in her Jack. You won’t find something that never existed in the first place.

The look on Miranda's face confirmed Will's belief as she looked at Jack with an expression that asked *'should I really be feeling remorse right now?'* "Alright." Jack slowly spoke as he scratched under his chin as he pushed the conversation forward. "Why the words carved into the wall?"

"You know how many times those insults were thrown at me, by men like them?" The coldness slowly began to return as Miranda's eyes narrowed with hidden hate. "How many times I was told the only way to make it in this world, the only way for me to get anywhere was if I *pleased* the right man?" The disgust coated her words like oil as it dripped off from her emotions and pooled right in front of her. "Those words were thrown at me the moment I turned down those pigs offers; you should have seen how they would shift. That gentlemen like façade would crack in seconds and soon you would see what really laid underneath. Which was nothing, but sludge."

The cold hate burned bright inside of Miranda and Will could feel that hatred reach out of her, splintering like the iced surface of a frozen lake. Will felt that ice hit him and begin to freeze his own emotions as they begin to mask as hers in the vulnerable state, they were currently in. Will had felt those emotions before when he placed himself in her shoes, they weren't as strong, a simple demo version of what she was feeling, but now being on the other side of the glass and witnessing those emotions in person. He was experiencing the full version and it had his own hackles rising at the thought of these men. Because like Miranda, Will had come across men and some women who would act like that. Not as much now, but when he was younger with his wide doe eyes and puppy like demeanor that he had yet found a way to take care of, it made him an easy target while he made his way through every stage of his young adult life.

Will would come across the slithering snake in the grass looking for a naïve or desperate prey to sink their fangs in and drag down into the dirt. Will found himself lucky to be gifted with some ability to see past their façade, their acts of "kindness" which was a disguised for their more unsavory actions, he was able to see past that and it gave him the leverage to turn them down. Their ploy always left him with disgust and disbelief towards those who offered, but those emotions seemed tamed compared to the explosive anger that came from them. They'd spit their venom in a poor attempt to make him feel like he was in the wrong for turning them down, how it was the biggest mistake of his life. When in reality it would have been a bigger mistake to agree with their off-brand devil like deal. Now he could feel those old emotions that he felt back then begin to rise to the surface, dusting off their bones and ready to come out to play again. Will's jaw slightly tightened and his fingers itched once more to be able to grip onto something.

"So does that answer all your questions, Crawford?" Miranda asked as she once more came down from her anger laced disgust rant. She collected herself once more as she waited for Jack's reply.

"Almost, I have one more question," Will tilted his head slightly as he tried to predict the next question that was about to leave the head agent's mouth. He only predicted the two, the ones that were already profiled and just needed conformation. "Why Will Graham?" Will felt his chest slightly tighten as his body was suddenly overcome by a cold icicle forming hold. If it wasn't for him still being conscious, he would have sworn his heart stopped. On the other

side of the glass Miranda seemed to be also taken back by the question as a sharp smirk played at her lips. Like this was the real question she had been waiting for all this time.

“Why that’s easy,” Miranda spoke her voice did not hide how pleased she felt towards the question. “I knew I had to stay under the FBI’s radar especially after my second achievement. I just knew word was going to get back to you and your little band of misfits. Especially when I took my trophy, I noticed how similar it would seem to a certain other serial killer that likes to pop up now and then.” Miranda slowly began to lean forward as the rest of her plan began to unravel itself and Will could feel his heartbeat picking up as he was about to finally understand why he was really caught in her web in the first place.

“And how does Will Graham play in that?” Jack asked as he rose an eyebrow and crossed his arms. His voice harder with a protective attitude laying underneath it, giving away how much displeasure he felt towards the killer, now that he knew that Will had been made a victim in her scheme. He had promised to have the agent’s back and here the man had stood in the wolf’s den without anyone not even himself knowing. It made the head agent wonder how far Miranda was willing to drag Will along and it made him slightly paranoid to think how close Will might have come to losing his own life to her. It made that anger towards Miranda rise with every dark thought that crossed Jack’s mind.

“Well I knew the best way to stay under your radar was to put myself under your prize seeing eye dog. Blind him to the point he could not fully guide you in the right direction.” She answered in a soft voice, her smile turned razor sharp revealing the right amount of teeth and Will felt himself cut opened. But that was it, there were nothing else, he knew if it wasn’t for the hollowness that still grew inside of him, he would be feeling something beyond the term damaged. Something stronger that left nothing behind its wake. But as he stood there taking in such a blow, something crossed his mind.

I’m supposed be feeling a sense of surprise towards this revealing fact that all this was a ploy, a lie and yet the only surprise I feel is that fact that I am not entirely taken back. Will found himself thinking as he took in the razor-sharp blade that was pressing against his battle-damaged heart. *Why am I not hurting even more now that I know the truth?* Will thought as his eyes studied Miranda, her smile still decorated her face as she revealed such a heavy piece to a puzzle Will didn’t realize was being out together. *Because you already knew all this, deep down when you were feeling that comfort of having someone close in your life that wasn’t tied to this macabre world that is starting to become a permanent residence. You knew that she was just like everyone else that comes across your path. She only saw one part of you and started to use it for her own advantages. Well congratulations Miranda, you had successfully blinded the FBI’s prize seeing eye dog.*

Will quickly pulled himself back when he realized the Miranda wasn’t done. “I needed to hide in plain sight, no one would expect Will’s new girlfriend to be the Black Widow. They’d just be too caught up in the fact that he actually had someone and that was all I needed.” Miranda tilted her head. “Now are you finished with all your pointless questions?”

“Yes, I think we are finally done here.” Jack said as he got up and Will caught the harden look on his face as he turned to leave.

“Oh before you go, tell Phyllis I’m sorry that our little dinner date never came into fruition. I was so hoping that all four of us could have had a wonderful night together.” Miranda spoke with an artificial sweetness that had Will’s stomach turning and teeth aching. It was one final attempt to get under Jack’s tough skin and the way Jack’s already hardened expression managed to harden even more. To the point it could crack and reveal the raging storm building inside of him. Both Will and Miranda knew that her last outlash had worked as Jack collectively stormed out of the room, Will expected that heavy door to slam, but it didn’t and Will was a little grateful about that. But with Jack gone along with his heavy storm, it only left himself and Miranda. As they both slowly turned their attention away from the door and back to the glass.

Both falling into a silent trance of some kind, neither one taking their eyes off of what was in front of them. Will felt a part of his mind that still nestled itself in the small nook of disbelief and denial, wishing that all this was a long vivid nightmare. That he would walk up in his bed at any moment, wrapped up in his sheet with his comforter kicked onto to the floor. Light from the new sun rising from past the tree lines and through the window. He would look up and see his dogs either deep asleep or waiting for him to begin his morning.

“I know you’re there Will.” Came Miranda’s velvet voice and it harshly ripped Will out of his trance. He straightened himself slightly while he refocused on the woman who sat alone in the interrogation room. For the first time he found he was no longer looking at the Black Widow, the woman who easily charmed four men, with the promise of a night of tainted pleasure, lured them into her web where she would take their lives without a second thought. All because she could no longer stand how they stained her world. Instead he was looking at the woman who made it a habit to entwin their arms together since their first date, the woman who brushed off his awkward behavior and embraced his oddities, the woman who slow danced with him in front of a roaring fire when she needed comfort. The woman who made a warm blossom bloom inside his chest from one kiss and kept it alive through their whole time together. He was looking at *his* Miranda again.

“I know you are standing there; I know you listened to everything I just told Crawford,” Will picked up a shift in her tone, something soft, something delicate. Miranda took in a heavy breath her eyes leaving the mirror as she looked around before she let out a soft sigh. “I want you to know what I told him was the truth,” she continued as she refocused her eyes back on the mirror, “but I didn’t tell him everything.” Will stood completely still while he waited for Miranda to continue on with her vague words and he found himself slowly beginning to doubt what she was about to tell him, before she even started. He found himself wrestling with the urge to simply leave, let her talk in the dark like how she led him around in it. But he did not move instead he only thought about leaving as he waited for Miranda to continue.

“You see Will,” Miranda continued as she leaned back in her chair, “what I said about you was true those were my intentions, to charm you and make sure that you were too focused on how I presented myself, how I treated you. That you would lower your guard around me and not connect the dots to the Black Widow. I’m not all that surprised it worked out well, I knew you were an outcast in your group, cautious towards most if not everyone.” Miranda took a breath as she shifted slightly in her seat. “It was a gamble really my whole plan, I expected you to notice the bait, but would you take it, was the real the question, which I was glad you did. I knew a part of you would be tempted at the idea of having a partner in your life,

because no matter what anyone says, no one truly likes to be fully alone. So my whole plan was to lead you on for a few months then frame Brittney for my crimes go off to London and come back like nothing ever happened. Then I would slowly draw myself back from you over time and finally just break it off for good, after I had successfully gotten away with all of it, until I no longer needed you." Will rolled his eyes while a small spark of frustration began to flicker in his chest, while he questioned why he was still sticking around only to be voluntarily be poked at with that sharpened dagger. "But what I didn't expect in all that were the feelings," Miranda's tone began to soften even more now as her eyes lowered to her hands. "You see that is the one thing I did not see coming," her lips began to pull into a remorseful smile. "I wasn't lying back there in the restaurant when it came to my rocky relationships, how all those men I dated would see one part of me and use it, all of them," her eye looked up at the mirror, "all except for you."

Will felt something stir inside his chest as he let her words and expression sink into her mind. The idea of walking out long gone, he now wanted to listen to her words even more. To understand where this all was going.

Don't listen to her Graham. Came a sharp thought. *Like Jack, she is just attempting to dig under your skin one last time. To have you squirm and question your actual worth in all this. But what if she is saying the actual truth though?* Came a surprisingly vulnerable thought that made Will pause and continue his focus on Miranda. *Look at her, she isn't preforming for me, she didn't slip the costume back on. She is opening herself up for you one last time.*

"Will what I am trying to saying is you managed to do the impossible, you managed to have me lowering my own guard for you like how you did for me. I'll admit I did panic when that happened, I didn't know what to do or how to feel. But slowly I accepted it and that is something I will never regret." Miranda let out a soft sigh. "I want you to know this, that though at first my feelings for you were staged ment to trick you into believing they were real." She lowered her head once more. "Over time they became all too real." She said softly as she began to fiddle with her nails. "I found myself falling for your charm like how you fell for mine and it had me rethinking my whole goal when it came to you. Had me wondering what was going to happen after London, if I could actually go through with the slow withdrawal and I realized that I might not have been able too." Miranda shook her head slightly and let out a soft chuckle built on disbelief.

"You had managed to trap me in your own little web without even trying and I found myself accepting it because it felt so nice to be seen beyond my profession, beyond my wealth, to be treated like an equal in the relationship. Maybe in some other world, some other time frame where the Black Widow didn't exist, maybe if our souls crossed paths back in New Orleans, then maybe we could have something far stronger than what I built on a lie. I would have liked that and I hope you would have to. To have something so close to that domestic bliss that is written in books and what childhood expectations are built on." Miranda's eyes left her hands as they looked up again and Will could have sworn, he noticed how they were glossed over with unshed tears. "I want you to know that I will always cherish the time we spent together and I want to thank you for those memories I am going to hold close. I just hope you will do the same as well." She finally finished with a soft warm smile.

An ache began to ripple across Will's chest while his jaw began to clench even tighter until he felt a dull pain spread through his jaw, but it wasn't enough to distract him from the newly forming ache in his chest. That was slowly replacing the hollowness that he had gotten somewhat use to, now he had to deal with the ache and he found himself pushing it down. Smothering it with all he had as he stared at Miranda, confirming to himself that he would not be cherishing those memories that he often found his mind going back to when they were apart for those two weeks, or when the nights felt heavy with loneliness. How could he look back at those memories and not see how stained they really were, how they were built on deceit and false feelings. No he couldn't, he wouldn't, he would simply tuck those memories and the feeling that are attached to them as far back of his mind as possible. Burry them away as he rebuilt himself, pour concrete over them as he worked on his newly reinforced fortress that was going to keep *everyone* out.

"That is all the questions I have for you Mister Graham; you may step down." Spoke the prosecutor as he turned away from Will, pleased with himself to successfully dissect the special agent and display the man in front of the court. While all Will felt was relieved that he survived the dissection and presentation without sharpening his tongue and lashing out. Will took a deep breath, half of him expected to feel the hole left behind from having his chest taken apart, his heart left out in front of the world. But everything was still in place. With stiff movements Will walked off the stand and made his way back to his original seat next to Hannibal, the fuzz that had once graced his mind only to escape him had returned to him as he walked towards the benches, it coated his mind and put his nerves at somewhat ease while he moved. The eyes no longer bored into him as they did when he first walked towards the operation table and the whispers though still lightly played in the air did not buzz around him like flies. Will continued his walk, until he felt something small pull at his attention, break through the fuzz's coating. He knew he shouldn't pay attention to the pull, the need, to ignore it and just keep moving. But he felt himself bending to the call, he turned his attention to his right and in an instant, he regretted it.

Warmth, that was what greeted Will when he turned to look at Miranda. Instead of the usual distain, anger, or annoyance, sometimes even a look of realizations with some cases after he stepped down from the stand and walked past the defendant. Where their eyes of heated anger drilled harshly into his skin in some weak attempt to make him feel threated. But not with Miranda, no she did not show any of those emotions, instead behind her eyes was a soft warmth and a small gentle smile decorated her expression as she looked at him. She wasn't upset with the words he spoke, or the fact he performed his job. Instead Miranda seemed almost pleased by the fact he continued on, that he did not falter in the slightest. Will found it hard to break their eye contact as Miranda looked at him with so much warmth and he began to recall the last words she spoke to him back at the interrogation room. "*Maybe in some other world, some other time frame where the Black Widow didn't exist, maybe if our souls crossed paths back in New Orleans, then maybe we could have something far stronger than what I built on a lie, I want you to also know that I will always cherish the time we spent together and I want to thank you for those memories I am going to hold close."*

That's when he felt it, that warmth that flowed through his chest as the once thought of dead blossom began to bloom all over again. Spreading its pedals that easily began to fill the hollow hole that took over his body. The flutter of pedals and renewal of comforting vines that crawled over his nerves and buried all the aches he had felt had his chest constricting and

muscles threaten to tense and freeze on the spot. Will felt something else inside of him as his stomach began to twist while his heart began to pound with excessive weight in it. He couldn't handle it any longer as he felt his own blood pulsing though his veins carrying out those elegant pedals with the cells. Will could feel the large room slowly closing in on him as the edges of his visions began to threaten to blur all while his eyes seem to hyperfocus on Miranda. The voices that once felt like nothing began to rise in a volume that made his ears ring and the eyes felt like hot coals slowly burning into his skin. His chest continued to constrict against his will and his stomach continued to twist itself into a tight knot that grew tighter and tighter as he felt a small wave a nausea began to be added to it. The tie around his neck began to feel like a deadly noose ready to snap his neck. Will quickly broke the eye contact and made his way past the benches, past the stares, and past the large heavy doors. He couldn't stand being in the same room as Miranda or in the same room with anyone, he needed space, needed air, he needed the feeling in his chest to go away.

The unforgiving cold of the ceramic floor stung through his pants and bit at his knees giving them an additional reason to ache. But Will did not care at the moment, he was too focused on the stomach contents he was vomiting into the toilet. A small section of his mind was somewhat grateful that he skipped having breakfast that morning, so all that came up was mostly stomach acid. It still made his throat burn as if a lit match was being held next to the tissue, but at least it ment there wasn't a lot there to cause a long purge. So he wouldn't be held up in the stall at the far end of the thankfully empty bathroom, with the only sound being heard was his own cracked wrenching. He knew between heavy breaths that he was just going to be in there long enough to get his body back under his control. As he continued to empty his stomach and keep his mind focused on just doing that. But sadly it wasn't that easy for him, because when his stomach was spasming in an unsuccessful attempt to get what wasn't even in there out, he still felt *it* lingering in his chest. That weed that called his chest cavity it's home, that untangled itself and spread its thorns though out his body and did not stop until every nerve in his system was touched by it, corrupted by its once welcomed feeling now turned into a siren song. The urge to reached into his chest, push past the muscle, break through his sternum, grab that weed by its stretching roots, and rip it out with full force. Feel as its roots tore out of his nerves, under skin as it was forced out of its once welcomed home, to hold it in his fists. Where he would both question its existence and curse it at the same time, before crushing it in his hands and watch as it turned to a cloud of false feelings.

Will leaned back as he rested his weight on his knees, his chest heaving in short breaths as he calmed himself down. Now that he knew his stomach was done purging itself of what little it had in it, leaving his throat burning and a disgusting taste in his mouth. Will let himself finally calm down, the tie around his neck didn't feel like a coiling python, his heart still beat a tad bit too heavily for his own comfort, but it showed signs of slowing down along with his breathing. Will stayed still in the stall as he let his body figure itself out, trying to keep his mind clear and simply focused on his breathing and not on anything else. He just needed a moment. That's when he felt something warm slowly begin to caress the side of his face. Will reached up and his finger tips were met with something small and wet, that barely covered the tip of his finger. He pulled his hand back and looked down at his hand where he was met with evidence of a shed tear drop. Will felt his chest begin to tighten, because he knew that this tear drop was not caused by his recent act of throwing up. No he knew what this tear ment and he could feel more of its kind threaten to be born, he also realized something else,

something more thought consuming. That this was the first tear he had actually shed since this whole ordeal began, since the final night at Miranda's house. He had not showed much emotions of being heart broken, just simply broken and now he was showing some of it. All this had Will quickly getting up off of the bathroom floor and making his way over the sink. He needed to clear his head some more and wash the taste of stomach acid out of his mouth.

The ice-cold water felt a bit relieving and it did its job of replacing the taste of acid with the taste of over filtration. The water helped ease some of the pounding heat that caked his skin and get rid of those small tails of tear shed. He continued to gather the cold water in his hands, that he noticed had started to shake at that point. *You're breaking all over again.* He thought as he splashed some water over his face, in hopes to calm down both his emotions and the raging heat that still built under his skin. *You were wrong, you couldn't handle seeing her, being in the same room as her. Now look at you, cracks are forming.* Will looked up at the mirror as the last of the water dripped down his face, his eyes focused on his reflections and for a split second he expected to see those cracks forming on his body. Instead all he saw was himself, though his face felt heated his skin looked colorless and though he attempted to wash away the idea of tears he could still see how red his eyes had become and he could feel the threat of more. *You're aren't breaking, you are broken.*

With that last thought corrupting his mind, Will pushed himself away from the sink. He had enough of all this. He showed up, he sat on the stand, played nice like he was told to. He wasn't needed anymore and what he needed was to be over a thousand miles away from this place. Will knew he needed more time to himself; repair the suit he had sewn himself, there were large tears the revealed too much of himself. He had been skinned once again and now he was left with raw nerves exposed for the world to see. He had to fix that and make it stronger than before.

When Will walked out of the bathroom he had one thing on his mind and that was to leave and not be seen for the rest of the day. His hands were formed into tight fists, he felt as though he was holding himself with only will power at the moment. He knew he was too raw at the moment, that the slightest poke would have him snapping back, baring teeth, and releasing undeserved frustration onto who ever held the stick. At the moment he was a walking form of dense unrestrained emotions that waited to for the right opportunity to simply snap. Will's head was slightly ducked and shoulders already bunched up in his default defensive stance. With his mind forced to stay on the one-way road that allowed him some semblance of guidance through the thick woods of emotions and his legs running on auto pilot, he hadn't registered that he faced the obstacle of running into someone until it actually happed.

When he opened the door with little to no care of how harsh he had done it, he really wasn't in the mood to be discreet anymore. The courtroom already laid damage onto him with their eyes and whisper what were a few more towards a man who felt like he no longer had to hold back. Will found himself running face first into Lecter. Part of Will was a little caught off, but another part already expected it to happen. Will took a slight step back to give space between their two bodies, neither one spoke a single word. As Will's elusive eyes danced around Lecter's upper half avoiding his searching eyes. While Hannibal simply stood there his eyes watching the other as he took in Will's appearance as he felt pleased to see that the other's new defense suit had not held up like Will wanted and it had left him a walking form of

exposed nerves. Tempting him to poke and prod at them until their owner finally bit at his hand. It was so very tempting. The fruit that Eve was offered in the garden of Eden.

“Will are you alright?” Came Alana’s soft concerned voice as she stepped around Hannibal. Though the doctor did not show it, he could feel the heated emotion of frustration slowly burn inside of him. Pointed towards the fact that Alana’s act of well-placed concern had once again ruined a very promising moment between himself and Will. Stepping into unknowingly protect the other. “You practically ran out of the courtroom, we wanted to make sure you were alright.” She continued as she took a few soft steps towards the profiler, who looked as though he might fall apart at any moment. It took all the strength Will had to not let that happen, not in front of two psychiatrist, who often had to control their own versions of hunger that came towards him.

“I’m fine I just needed some air.” Will half lied, he had caught the discreet movement of Lecter’s head and the micro raise of his eyebrow, it told Will that he was caught in his excuse. He felt his already tight fists tightening even more, blunt nails digging into his palms. Not sharp enough to punter the skin, but he knew that as soon as he looked down at his palms, he would see the half-moon shape indents there to remind him. The subtle act had given him something to ground himself while he maneuvered himself though the no doubt maze of a conversation he was about to be put into. With Lecter it was a maze, that either helped lead him to his own conclusions or left him biting his own neck in frustrations, but with Alana there in the conversation Will knew she would be holding a map for him to look at from time to time.

“Well after a talk with Jack and one with the D.A,” Alana began with a slight sigh of announce from the interaction she had while she crossed her arms. “They both agreed that it might be best not to call on you from this point on. That the testimony you gave will be the only one.” Alana added with a slight smile to show some form of relief that was ment for Will to take in, but at the moment he could not feel that lightness that relief often brought others. The weight was still pressed against his chest, something still weighed him down.

“Though that does sound relatively refreshing, I cannot help fill a little surprised by the decision.” Hannibal spoke as two pairs of eyes both holding similar questions went to him, at first his eyes were on Alana. “Especially since Miss. Rhettford’s attorney didn’t seem that much interested in what Will had to say.” Hannibal’s eyes then slowly focused more on Will. “Since after all your words and former relationship holds the most weight in all this.” His words slithered out of his mouth pushed by his own sharp silver tongue. It was enough to hit at those exposed nerves that teased him to no end. He watched as Will’s jaw began to flex from him clenching his teeth, all in an attempt to keep himself together in front of both himself and Alana. Will was showing signs of coiling up and getting ready to strike, he just needed another little hit and those unfiltered emotions would be all his.

“Maybe Miranda, simply didn’t want her attorney to attack Will, I still believe what she felt for him was real and she was showing at least some form of remorse while this all happens.” Alana offered once again playing the role of protector, which Hannibal felt himself rising towards the act and reading himself to either agree with her claim in order to push Will in one direction of feeling conflicted with Miranda’s true feelings or disagree with the idea of Miranda feeling anything for the other intentionally pointing Will in the other direction

where it would have him questioning every sickeningly sweet heartfelt feeling Will had for the woman, who once shown him a world only his dreams could bring him. A world of normalcy and acceptance, a life that Will only fooled himself into believing he was ment to live in. Either way it would wound the profiler even further and that is what the doctor truly wanted.

“Perhaps that could be a way to look at the situation.” Hannibal simply responded as he turned to look over at Alana. There was enough skepticism hidden under his sentence it would play at Alana’s mind and he could already see the way her brows wanted to furrow and her lips slightly pursed. “If you want to add some humanity into Miss. Rhettford’s behavior, look on the brighter side of all this and give her some benefit of the doubt. I will not deny you any peace of mind.” He had added in to help cement the train of thought he was engineering while he watched the dots connect in the woman’s mind, he flicked his eyes over at Will, who had easily caught on to Hannibal’s line of thinking and he could see his expression slightly sink further in as his own thoughts began to attack themselves. Making Hannibal itch to be able to force himself into that havoc ridden battle field, to stand among the chaos and debris

Alana slightly shook her head. “I’ll have to disagree with you Hannibal,” Hannibal slightly quirked an eyebrow clear he was intrigued at the disagreement Alana was presenting towards him. “I honestly believe that the feelings Miranda had felt for Will were genuine and that she is showing remorse not for her crimes, but for the outcome of the relationship she had with him.” Alana imposed with enough conviction in her tone that it balanced out Hannibal’s attempt to fill the conversation with doubt.

“Yet over time they became all too real.” Miranda’s silken words began to echo in Will’s mind all over again, soothing out those barbed spikes that he put there to protect it and the feeling swayed down into his chest and he felt that bothersome warmth all over again. Will tried not to think of it, but the task was near impossible while Alana stood there unknowingly speaking the truth. That what Miranda had, did feel for him was something true. That their whole relationship held some truth in the woven web of lies that she had trapped him in and he could feel his chest begin to tighten and his heart constricting around the bones that were supposed to protect it. Will could feel the cracks splintering through his body, chipping at the threatening ribcage, and opening up for those vines to crawl through.

“I have to go.” Will quickly spoke reminding the two that the conversation that they were having was happening in front of the subject of interest. As he pushed past them, shoulders hunched as he tried to control the cracking, slow it down while in the view of tow prying minds that either wanted to see him splintering apart or worried that it would happen. Not paying attention to the concerned expression Alana had given him as she realized her mistake or the subtle smugness that combined with slight intrigue that Lecter had.

“Will.” Alana called out as she attempted to make a step in the direction he had walked off into. Only to be stopped by Hannibal as he put out a hand in front of her. She turned to look at him with slight frown and knitted brows, silently questioning his actions. Already forming the action to simply step past him and continue to go after her friend.

“I believe it would be best for Will, if we both gave him some space,” Hannibal calmly explained, clear he was not going to let Alana go after the agent at the moment. “Wouldn’t you agree?” He merely asked to drive his point home and the way Alana’s facial muscles shifted to a more understanding look that had a hint of dejection. She slowly nodded her head agreeing with what he had to say. The edge of Hannibal’s lip twitched slightly upwards as he watched Alana take his words, knowing her need to do the best for Will’s mental health and his own input would come together and sway the need she felt to be there for the profiler. To comfort the roaring emotions that pulsed off of Will like a raging thunder storm, while at the same time left the perfect opening for Hannibal. He was already making mental notes on where he could strike when they interacted next, in his office, in his space, where it would only be the two of them. Giving him enough leverage on the situation that it would only drive out the rawest of emotions from Will and he could feel his hunger for those emotions rise deep within him while he watched as Will disappeared.

Lost that is how he felt deep down as he faced the unpredictable world of dreams, he thought he could escape the astray sensation that clouded his mind and filled his body. The feeling followed him even into the land of slumber, a trip he had tried to put off through at the havoc raining day, only to be unable to do so when his body began to show more prominent signs of needing rest, even though he tried to put off the act as much as possible. With small acts around the house, organizing things that did not need to be organized, checking on his dogs needs over the normal number of times. It came to the point that Will was pretty sure his own dogs were getting tired of the act, they’d stare at him as though they knew what he was doing.

Will was actually surprised the moment the first yawn had escaped his chest, to give off a warning of what was soon to follow. He had thought that he would still be too wired up from the courthouse to even consider the idea of slumber. His mind raced like the speed of light with a low buzz that made his hands slightly twitch in an unsteady motion, making it far too difficult for him to try to put that focus to the more relaxing hobby of his. Making his work bench and unfinished lure a source of frustration, knowing that activity could possible chase away the bundle of agitation and fried nerves still popping. Leaving Will to search to find another way to calm down the emotions that still boiled inside of him only to be taken by surprised after the sun’s decent and the moon’s appearance to let out a stifling yawn and soon to follow feeling of tiredness. Where after trying to fight it off he had no choice, but to follow his body’s command to retire to bed. There he let the stages of sleep over take him and he fell victim to the natural act.

The nightmare at first like always disguised itself as a submissive dream, a reoccurrence of bare trees that showed no welcome to him as the forest floor covered in a pure white snow, the only purity that ever appeared in his twisted dreamscape. Had him lulling into a false sense of security, finally given something other than that dark obsidian void of nothingness that had never brought any restfulness after waking the next morning. At first, he had thought perhaps for once he was going to be given that trail that his mind seemed to love to put him on, where he would walk for possibly an eternity, as he was surrounded by only the snow and barren trees. Watching his breath be caught into the supposably cold air, cold that he never felt, but knew was there. As he listened to the crunch of the snow under his heavy steps as he played his usual role of walking along the empty trail, eyes searching the dense forest. While he walked down the winding trail, his mind in a soft fuzz of compliance as he found himself

slowly unwinding to the scene he was in, of course that was when his imagination always decided to strike like the natural predator that it was. Moving silently as its razor-sharp claws helped masked its approach while it stalked him, with laser focus waiting for the perfect time to pounce and sink its deadly teeth into his throat. Where it will hold him its unforgiving maw, teeth sinking into skin, piercing vital veins as it bleeds him dry.

Will had walked down the familiar trail, his feet acting on their own accord, as his ears strained to take in any sound that could be heard in the desolate forest. His eyes looking for another soul, though another part of him hoped he would not find anything in this infinite trail. That he was the only one trapped in the never-ending loop of a pathway, that he was its only victim. But then the other half of his mind still called out for the hopes of finding another soul to come across, just so he would not have to walk alone any longer. That part of him, Will tried to smother as much as possible, to push it in the far depths of his mind and keep it there. In an iron box, littered with locks and bults that would keep it shut so it could no longer plague his forethoughts. That way the wounds that still slowly healed over time could be left unprovoked and given the space to heal properly.

As he continued his loop, Will found himself stopping when he looked a head and notice something odd with the path. While he approached, he took in the indents in the dirt, that struck his interest and pulled at his curiosity. Will walked up to the indents and slowly knelt down into the dirt, his knee pressing into the soft soil as examined what was marking the trail. Which was a large paw print, bigger than anything his own dogs could leave behind, Will placed his own hand next to print to gage the size and was a bit taken back when it was larger than his own hand. He slowly looked up after studying the large print and soon he noticed the trail of indentations left behind that stretched out in front him. Calling out to him to follow, which he found himself obeying, he stood up and followed the paw prints. Having an itching idea of what he was about to find as he now followed the large wolf prints.

Will followed this newly appeared path that marked the trail, not sure where exactly it would lead him. He hoped that it would be out of this labyrinth, but there was a heavy speculation that it wouldn't. If he was familiar with how is imagination liked to torment him at times of complete lull than these prints would most likely lead him towards danger. Yet he kept following them as if they could guide to the final destination of this trail, to lead him out of the dead forest. He was still on alert when he followed the prints, his eyes darting up to look around his never changing surroundings, he had to make sure nothing slithered out of the thick trees and caught him while he was focused on this new goal of his.

But as Will began to take in the idea that this trail would not end, that he would simply be trapped in this endless cycle, everything shifted. As he followed the wolf's large prints, he found the trees began to tapper apart and an opening forming in front of him. Something that Will did not truly expect to see happen, he had thought it was a possibility, but his mind was close to accepting the doubt that it wouldn't, that the fact it could open up felt like a fleeting feather caught in a strong wind. Yet here it was proving him wrong and making him slightly a fool as he watched as the path began to widen.

Soon he found himself walking towards a large clearing. There were no longer any large clutter of trees lining the path, instead he stood at the ending of the path and now faced a large open field layered with pure white snow. He took in the opening, his eyes scanning over

the pristine field, the trees that stood a welcoming distance, and the sky over casted with light grey clouds. Diming down the brightness of the snow and also holding promise of more. Before Will took a tempting step out into this new found freedom, he stopped himself as suspicion began to play at the back of his mind. Pulling at him to stay where he stood for just a moment as though it preferred the woods over this field and Will found himself listening to his suspicion. He glanced back at the trail he had just walked down and found it completely gone, the trees had closed in on it. Making it appear as though it never existed in the first place and cutting Will from ever going back, he even found himself reaching out and touching one of the trees to see if they would disappear, but he was met with the firm bark of the tree. He also noticed the trees where so close together that it would be almost impossible for him to walk through if he actually wanted to go back.

The startling sound of someone obviously clearing their throat cut through Will's focus and made him jump slightly. Before he quickly turned around, his hand instinctively going to his hip, but he stopped when he was caught off guard when he was met with who had made the sound. There in front of him with a soft smile was Alana, wearing a very nice black dress that contrasted against the pure snow with pearls that stood out against her neck. Will looked at her confused, by her sudden appearance, she was the last person he'd expected here, but before he could open his mouth Alana began to speak.

"You wouldn't know how happy I am for you." She said as she reached out and began to adjust his white bowtie? Will quickly looked down and was taken back by the sight of himself, once again wearing the custom-made waistcoat, the one he felt nothing towards when he was ridding himself of it, a gift that he once felt the hard work and affection sown into each thread, that quickly turned into evidence of how Miranda had managed to blind him. The waistcoat had appeared on his body once more and it was paired with a black shirt. Will quickly looked up from watching Alana adjust his bowtie, her hands now straightening out the fabric on his shoulders. Questions began to build up inside his mind, but once more before he could voice even a single one, Alana continued. "I mean I had slight hope when you two first started out, that you two would become something. I just never thought." Alana shook her head with a smile, Will could have sworn he seen tears building in her eyes. She let out a soft breath as she finished straightening out his outfit, her hands resting on his shoulders. "But here we are." Her eyes on him again. The confusion was still building inside of Will's mind and it seemed like every time he found the space to insert his voice he was caught off.

"Hey what's going on over here?" Came another familiar voice that caught Will's focus and Beverly came walking up in a familiar outfit to Alana's. "Don't tell me Romeo here is getting cold feet?" She said with a bit of disbelief as she crossed her arms and raised an eyebrow. "Because if you are."

"He's not getting cold feet," Alana interrupted clearly putting some of Beverly's thoughts at ease, but the speculation was still obvious on her face. As she pushed at the inside of her lower lip with her tongue and slowly nodded her head.

"Sure," Beverly said dragging the word out just to voice the doubt. "The only reason I'm not going to push it, is because it's your big day Romeo." She said with a slight smirk. "But we

really need to get this show on the road. Everyone is getting a bit antsy." Beverly added as she looked over at Alana then at Will.

"Tell them not to worry," Alana said with a smile, "we're all done here." Alana added as she smiled towards Will, who still stood there slightly confused and still voiceless. Alana then reached out and placed a hand on Beverly's upper arm. "Go let everyone know that the ceremony is about to start."

"Good, because I've got twenty bucks ridding on the fact that Zeller is going to cry at some point in all this." Beverly said with a friendly smirk, her way of lightening up the mind twisting mood, before she turned and began to walk away. Will stood there with more questions piling up and all he could do was let it happen, because at the moment the dam that would release those questions out into the open was not cracking, or showing signs of letting those questions through. Questions like, what was going on, where did you come from, what are you talking about, and what ceremony? No one was making sense to him at the moment and the more they talked the more his thoughts felt clouded with confusion and unable to voice questions.

"Now that's settled, come one it's time to get this show on the road." Alana said as she took Will's hand, the touch of her grip sent a shock of cold through his being. A cold he thought he would only feel if he had stuck his hand in the snow and nowhere else. Alana began to lead Will into the open field and he did not feel himself putting up much of a resistance to it. Because at least this had ment that he was going to be given answers soon. An answer he did not predicted his tormenting imagination to grant him as he grew closer into the center, where the once deserted area of nothing but a sea of white was being filled.

Will looked around while he took in the now misplaced sight, of a long dark red carpet that had a rich glow thanks to the pure white snow and on either side of that carpet were dark oak church pews set in even rows with golden etching carved on the sides in whimsical vine like design. As Will was guided down the carpet, to a destination he still could not quite make out just yet, it felt as though that his mind was leaving that reveal for the last minute, another reason to torment him for as long as possible. While Will was lead down the red carpet, he looked over to those who took up the pews, most of them were completely empty, but as he grew closer to wherever he was going, he could make out a few familiar faces. On his right on the first two pews located at the front sat Jimmy, Zeller; who both wore black formal suits, and Beverly. Who gave him an encouraging smile while subtly giving him a thumbs up, Jimmy had more of the soft kind of smile that translated to him being happy for Will; a reason the man still could not understand why. Finally Zeller, who had a more laid-back smile, which held the same meaning as Jimmy's, but it was more practiced so it could read better. But something did not settle right in Will's mind as he looked across at the three, something felt absent in the image. Something, perhaps someone was missing and it began to gnaw at the man the more he looked. He knew the answer was far easier to come up with, yet his brain was giving him blanks and he wished he knew why.

Will turned his attention away from the small friend group and over towards his right, he could feel his eyes widen as he laid his sight on the dead. Sitting on the opposite of the friend group was Benedict Moore, Eric Salazar, Lloyd Banks, and Gavin Kramer. All sitting in the church pews, as if their actual bodies we not already rotting away in the real world. Slowly

turning into sustenance for the earth and feed for the bugs that found their way into their coffins. Instead they resembled who they looked in the pictures used to identify them. They looked alive with color returned back to their skin, bodies unharmed by the sharp end of golden fabric scissors. Heartbeats still working as the blood that once stained their corpses now returned back into the veins that would treasure it. It was as if death head never took their hands, as if the Black Widow had never snagged them in her web in the first place. They were returned back to the world of the living, given life thanks to Will's imagination. Their backs straightened and attention turned forward, not giving Will any mind and he felt some solace in that, last time he had their eyes on them, he came to a cruel awakening.

"Here we are," came Alana's voice drawing Will away from watching the four men, waiting for them to turn their hollow gaze onto him, but they never did, they just kept looking forward. Alana took a deep breath as she turned to face him, her smile as bright and warm as ever as she looked at him, Will could even make out a twinkle playing in her eye. "Again I cannot stop saying how happy I am for you, for the both of you," she said, "I mean to think you and her, it's just so beautiful." She breathed out, adding more on to the towering pile of questions that threated to give under their own weight. But like before, Will could not command his vocal cords to produce any of those questions, to release some of that crushing weight, Alana spoke once more. "No more time for talking, the future Mrs. Graham is waiting for you."

Will, felt his eyes widen and his lips parted slightly as his mind came to a quick halt of realization finally putting all the blatantly obvious pieces together. Alana let go of his hand, taking away that cold touch that grounded him slightly, now she was moving out of his view to go take a seat, and Will felt a desperate need to pull her back to him. To try and force words out his mouth, to get those questioned answered. But Alana steps were far too quick for him to stop her, revealing to Will for the first time what he was being led to.

There in front of him was a white wooden alter, with red and white roses weaving in and out in their own intricate dance as one color settled against the other. Their meanings balancing the other out leading into each other as pure innocent love turned into passion and desire. As they climbed to the high arch where the flowers gathered in a delicate cluster at the top where the flowers sat nestled together. Will's eyes left the alter and focused on the two who stood underneath its evolving meaning. There in the center standing tall was Jack in all black, a warm almost father like smile on his face and clasped in his hands that rested in front of him was a black leather-bound Bible, its title written in a gold that the snow altered the shine to. The man stood there watching Will waiting for the agent to approach the alter.

But Will did not move from where he stood, instead his eyes slowly left the head agent now turned justice of the peace; a symbol that Will did not have the mental energy or focus to dissect. Instead his focus went over to the person who held the spot light in Will's eye. There to the left standing as though heavens light was shining down on her in an angelic mirage, was Miranda. Draped in an elegant eye-catching cream-colored wedding dress. With sheer jeweled sleeves, that collected over her shoulders like rain drops which came together to form a collar. The jewels then dripped down towards her heart shaped neckline into her bodice and scattered in a splash of golden shimmers over her waist before disappearing in to the large flowing tulle skirt, that cascaded down the steps like rushing water that lead up to the alter. Will felt memorized looking at Miranda, who slightly faced Jack, before her attention left the

man as though she could sense Will standing at the foot of the carpet. She slowly turned to him with a warm smile as she revealed more of herself and Will could feel his feet moving without his command as he made his way slowly towards the alter, he was in a trance, he was caught in Miranda's unsung siren song that called out for him. He could register a buried part of his mind that scrambled to get control over his body, to stop him from walking onto the alter. Claws trying to sink into the ground and pull him in the opposite direction, but Will kept walking until he filled the place of the groom. Where he could take in all of Miranda, no longer standing at a cautious distance.

Where Will could not help how his mind slowly became consumed in her beauty, the way her beautiful features were enhanced by the kiss of lightly applied make up that caused her complexion to hold a soft glow, lips painted a deep red that stood out amongst her features easily drawing Will's eyes to her mouth every time they wondered to the rest of her. Her dark hair gathered in a neat updo style that had the same jewels that decorated her dress, now shined in her hair, giving Miranda the illusion of a halo. Something that the still free part of Will's mind knew did not fit her. But at the moment as he stood across from such an enticing image Will found himself not caring in the slightest, as Mirada stood across from him holding in her hands a large bouquet of red and white roses. Her smile and beauty holding him in place.

"I am so happy you are here sweetheart." Miranda smoothly spoke as she looked over at Will, who still could not gather his now lost voice as he stood on the alter and an odd feeling came over him. While he stood there across Miranda, standing in front of a group of those, he spent his days with, he realized he too was happy standing up there with her. A warm familiar feather like feeling fluttered through his chest which was unlike the weed, he did not wish to rip out of his body, as it fluttered over his entire body. Brining him a comfort that he had not felt in what could have been weeks, it kissed at his exposed nerves and it drifted over that hollow hole that still corrupted his chest, it gave a promise that if he let the feather continue in its path that it might be able to fill that cavity. Will soon began to feel a smile begin to carve itself onto his face. Miranda then turned her eyes over towards Jack, before uttering the two words Will thought he would never hear in this setting. "I do."

Jack bowed his head slightly at the answer before he turned to Will. "Do you have the ring?" he asked and Will opened and closed his mouth, caught off by the sudden jump to I do's, not prepared for this sudden leap. But his focus was once more ripped to another direction, his imagination not giving him enough time to focus on blaring sirens before directing him to another. He felt something in his closed hand, something small and hard. Will looked down as he slowly opened his hand and there sitting in his palm was a delicate golden ring, with small rubies held in the duel band that weaved wildly with each other before settling in the center. Where nestled between two larger rubies was a princess cut diamond that twinkled like a lone star caught in the night sky.

Will looked up from the ring and over towards Jack, who once again bowed his head clearly pleased that the other discovered the ring, before his eyes gestured over to Miranda. Will quickly turned his attention back towards the bride, who smiled softly at him, also pleased he made the discovery, before she extended her left hand towards him. Where he noticed the shine of the charm bracelet hanging from her wrist, he also noticed tow more addition charms hanging from the jewelry, a pad lock, and a heart. He did not linger on the bracelet, instead

Will reached out with his hand, gently taking Miranda's as his other that held the newly appeared ring between his fingers. Will readied himself to slip the ring onto Miranda's waiting finger, sealing themselves together for as long as the passing of time would allow. He no longer questioned his surroundings, that untouched part of himself that wanted him to fight, now silent. Will slowly became compliant with what was going on and he found himself accepting everything, that was until he heard it. The sudden sound brushed against his ear and halted his movements, the ring not completely on Miranda's finger, it barely made it around the tip. Before the sound that haunted his nightmares sang out towards him in an angelic melody, the soft sound of chains colliding against each other.

Though a new part of his mind, the complete opposite of the one that was muted, begged him not to turn his head, to not let the chimes distract him from what was happening. Will found himself turning back towards where everyone sat and there at the far end of the red carpet stood the large wolf with its onyx-colored fur that was only broken up by the golden chains the hugged its body. It stood there watching Will, with eyes that screamed out its feelings, how it felt, betrayed mixed coldly with disappointment. Will stared back at the creature as he took in the large wolf's emotion, its feelings sinking heavily into the man's chest, freezing him to the spot as guilt began to form inside of him. Chasing away that once welcomed flutter as Will stood still, the wolf began to make its way towards the man. Large paws staining the carpet with each step and those heavy chains sang out with each movement of the wolf's muscular body.

While the wolf made the same walk Will had done not moments prior, something began to take place along with the wolf precise steps. In the corner of his eye, Will noticed those who sat in the pews were starting to be affected. Every step the wolf took, claws digging into the carpet an outer influence took place. Those who sat on the right began to flicker in and out of existence, one moment they would be sitting there with painted smiles that Will could no longer feel the meanings behind, all he saw was an illusion at play. While those who sat on the left, a much more tragic display took root. Those four men with each movement of wolf, they began to flick back and forth between life and decay. One moment they were living breathing men sitting there as though the world around them was a true reality with air still able to enter their lungs and life being given with a still beating heart. The next their color now drained from them, eyes glossed over in an empty stare and their throats stained with dried blood that seeped into the white of their dress shirt. They flickered in out of life and death like a corrupted image caught on a faulty VHS tape, being forced to rewind and then fast forward over and over again, until the one holding the remote finally settled with their excessive command or the tape finally busted. Destroyed in a melted shell of plastic and film, far too damaged to be properly repaired, the show it once held lost to time and fire.

The wolf let out a low sound that laid between a whimper and a bark, it easily drew Will's stuck mind back to it as it came to a halt in the middle of the walk way. It stood there, legs shaking slightly from the heavy weight of the golden chains, its solum eyes calling out to the man. Questioning eyes asking if this was what he truly wanted, if he was not going to offer it relief like he had the first time they met. Where the wolf had given him its trust and now, he was going to back away from it and leave it with a crushing burden that was forced upon it. Will stood there, eyes locked with the wolf's and he could feel a familiar pull emerge inside of him drawing him towards the animal that still needed his help. A soft chime of gold hitting the hard floor of the alter cried out as the ring had slipped from Will's hand, as he

slowly stepped away from Miranda. His hand no longer holding hers, while his legs carried him to a destination that his mind did not fight against. His footsteps heavy as he walked towards the wolf that stared at him, their eyes locked together and for a moment there was a flash of approval in the animal's deep eyes as it watched Will make the correct choice.

His hand reached out towards the wolf as it watched him, raising its head slightly to give him access to the chains that clung around its neck that ran down towards its chest. Waiting for Will to continue where he had left off last time, the chains had restructured themselves around the animal, so they hung tight against it like they had before Will had intervened the first time. Will grew closer to the large creature, his eye focused on the chains, no longer paying attention to his surroundings, not noticing how his friends were no longer there with him, or how the four slain men rested in their more realistic form. No longer held together by the illusion of the living that his imagination tried to fool him with, to get him to lower his guard and lull him into an enticing trap. That his heart though cracked and damaged still craved for with every shuttering beat.

Suddenly everything came to a hard halt, that arm the reached out towards the wolf quickly snapped downwards towards his side and his body suddenly felt trapped as he could no longer move. Soon a familiar warmth began to seep through his entire body as a tightening constriction wrapped around his muscles. The wolf's eyes widen as it stood there watching with concerned eyes, Will slowly looked down, in the back of his mind he knew what had happened to him, but he still prayed it wasn't true. The tightness grew around him, confirming Will's thoughts and defeating that still small ember of doubt that wanted to ease a part of his mind that could banish the fear that lingered beneath the surface. Will's eyes traveled down his body and what little could be surprised was, as he noticed he had his own set of golden chains wrapped around him. Holding him in a tight embrace that had a form of warmth that easily simulated a hug, trying to lull him back into the compliant mindset that he had earlier while he stood on the alter.

Unlike before though Will did not fall easily for the comforting warmth of the eye holding beauty, he quickly began to struggle against the chains hold. Muscles flexing undeath the metal as he twisted his body as much as he could, trying wiggle and shake himself free from their grasp. But the more he struggled the tighter the hold became, squeezing into him like a constrictor, the chains grew tighter and tighter. Pressing into him until he felt it deep into his bones, unable to flex under their hold like his muscles could, they had no choice but to fight underneath them. The only ease of mind that Will could come up with while he still struggled to free himself was that he could not feel any pain that would definitely happen if this was all real. He could not feel the ache radiating through him as the chains fought with the bones that refused to give under their pressure. Only way they would, would be if they snapped.

Soon his legs gave out under him and he was brought to his knees. A low whimper caused Will to cease his futile attempt to escape the chains. Will looked up and eye level with the wolf, only a foot or two away from it. The wolf looked over at him with sober eyes, before lowering its head and slowly lying on the ground as if showing Will that there was nothing he could do. Now that they both faced a life with the chains wrapped around their bodies. That there were no other options for them and that he should just accept this new fate that he faced. Will could not help it and it could not help him. Will quickly shook his head, trying to convey to the creature that he would not give up, that he would still fight these chains that

bound him, just like the wolf should as he flexed and twisted himself. Fighting against the tight hold, with every twist the chains sang out, clanking together as they wrapped around him. He was not going to give up, not again.

“Sweetheart.” Came a soothing voice and Will once more stopped for a split second, lifting his head more as he tried to look over his shoulder. He had forgotten that it wasn’t just him and the wolf at the moment. But before he could turn his head, he felt two soft hands gently placed on both sides of his face and guide him back to look forward. Where he could see Miranda bent over him, holding his face with a caring smile as she looked down at him. “Sweetheart.” She said once again in a more coo like fashion as her thumbs loving stroked his cheekbones, her head tilting slightly to the side. Will froze as he looked up at Miranda, now and then his body twisted while she held his face, but it wasn’t as strong as before. He felt his mind wanting to slip back into being complaint, to no longer fight against the chains while he stared up at her. Soon his fighting came to a complete halt, while he found himself getting lost in Miranda’s eyes and gentle hold. Miranda’s smile widened at the sight of Will no longer fighting against the chains. “There we go,’ Miranda softly said her voice velvet and so light that the air could easily carry it away. “Now just relax and let it happen.” She spoke as she leaned forward and Will’s own body mirrored her actions, their faces grew closer and their lips merely a breath apart.

Will’s body shot up with a start, his heart pounded wildly in his chest to the point he could feel it in every inch of his being. The heavy thumping so loud it cried out in his ears, mixing with the heavy breathing from his lungs that begged and pleaded for air, that it was taking in with the greed of a rich man. Even though Will tried to take in the plentiful amount of air, his lungs still behaved like he was starving them of the act. One hand clasped tightly at the front of his shirt, his knuckles turning white while he tried to calm himself down, feeling his racing heartbeat and heaving chest that housed both his panicking heart and starving lungs. The other hand braced on the open side of his bed, pressing into the mattress. Frantic blurry eyes raced around the dark silent room, darting from one familiar object to the other, but his brain did not register anything that his eyes tried to linger on. His mind was in a full fog induced panic. Trying to decipher what was real or a nightmare, if he had woken up or just shifted into another stage, everything always felt so real and that was another down side to being cursed with an over active imagination paired with an over flow of empathy. Everything always felt like it belonged to him until he was forced to pull his true self away from the role he was pushed into.

With his heart beat steading and lungs collecting themselves, Will slowly began to settle down and as he did so he noticed something. Rolling down his cheek was a soft warmth and with a shaky hand Will felt it again, the wet trace of newly shed tears, he pulled his hand away and stared down at his fingers. Through blurry sight he knew were from tears Will looked at the wet spot that rest on his fingertips. Before he could stop himself, to control his emotions that had waited for his barriers to be lowered, more tears came cascading down his face. He could no longer hold himself together any longer, he could not push down the feelings he had thought he could simply ignore, it had built up over time and now they were all coming out and there was nothing he could do, but let it happen. He sat there on his bed feeling so foolish as more and more tears poured out of his eyes. It took every little ounce of control he had to keep himself from full on weeping, he could feel the sorrow building up in his throat and bashing against his teeth. Wanting him to open his mouth and let out just one

sound, any sound, but Will kept his mouth shut and he squeezed his eyes closed, all in order to get himself under full control. After a few crawling moments of holding in sobs and free-falling tears, Will felt himself finally settling down. His chest no longer heaved in an uncontrol stuttering and his eyes had finally ran out tears to shed. He slowly opened his eye, his body shuttering every now and then, not completely done with letting out the emotions he tried so very hard to ignore or lock up. His body now feeling slightly lighter than it had before and mind no longer fogged over, there was an odd sensation of clarity that came over him as he sat in his bed. It was not a sensation of emptiness instead is something more of being at ease with himself.

A soft whimper caught Will's attention and for a split second his mind went back to the wolf and that he had not fully woken up. But as he looked over, he could see the slightly blurry image of his pack, all awake and all looking at him with concern in their soft eyes. Will quickly wiped the tears away from his eyes. "I'm fine guys." Will spoke, he noticed the slight shake in his voice, but he was too tired to care completely. As he cleared his vision and took in one more shaky breath, he noticed how his dogs still looked over at him, clearly not buying the lie they were told, hell Will didn't even believe it himself. "Really I'm fine." He said with a little more emphasis even trying to muster up a smile to give them, but not even that could stay. They continued to look at him and Jackson let out a slight huff as if telling him that none of them were believing him. Winston stood up from his bed, slowly stretching out as he walked over to Will's bed. Where the dog put his head on the bed inches from Will, where the man could feel the small spurts of breath coming out of Winston's wet nose, as the dog looked up at him, his tail slightly wagging. Will looked down at Winston, a more genuine soft smile playing at his face as he looked down at the dog, who knew how to play at the man's emotion and also knew what he needed. Even though Will had a somewhat relaxed rule about them being in the bed when he was in it, he really did not care about that. Because at the moment the bed felt far too big for him to handle and his heart could use the unconditional love, they offered him. Will let out a soft breath as his smile turned into a smirk as he looked down at Winston. "Alright come on."

With his approval the dog lifted his head, his tail wagging a bit harder, clearly happy with the man's decision before he jumped on the bed. Taking a spot right next to Will's side and almost in an instant Will felt his nerves settled down even more. As soon as Winston jumped on the bed the rest of the pack acted on the moment and also joined the two, all rearranging themselves in order to properly fit. A chuckle escaped Will as he watched as his dogs took in the approval with greed, he even found himself helping the smaller ones onto the bed, as they attempted to climb, but kept failing to make the mark. Soon everyone had found their own spot on the bed and Will was somewhat impressed by how they all fit so well together. Filling up the space that left him feeling utterly alone for a few seconds. Will took in the sight one more time a smile still settled on his face before he slowly laid back down. He felt his legs brush past Harley, the last and possibly the largest of his pack; who seemed to not have minded as he let out a yawn. Will's arm slowly lowered sliding past Milo, whose curly tail began to beat against his rib as the small dog watched Will lower his arm, as if Milo found the sight amusing, his under bite did not help the idea.

In a few seconds of arranging himself Will felt more at ease with himself and his surroundings than he had in months. As he listened to the soft deep breaths of his pack as they surrounded him, protecting him from whatever nightmare that dared to enter his dreams

while he slept. Will felt his eyes slowly begin to drop and for once he did not feel the need to fight off the sleep that blanketed over him, he focused the still present part of him mind on how Winston’s soft fur felt between his fingers, the way dog’s side expanded and deflated under his palm, and comforting warmth the seeped off of Winston’s body and into his. It helped lull his owner to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Okay first off I know in the show it's cannon that Will is referred to as a bloodhound I get it, but since this is fanfiction I get to put my own headcannon in I did just that. I personally see him as a seeing eye dog more than a bloodhound. Why? Because, he can see through others perspectives, he sees clues that no one else can see and then he will guide them into the right direction. That and sometimes without him they pretty much run around blind. So that's my thoughts on all this.
Also I know trials don't actually go like way I written it, but like I said this is fanfiction some rules just don't apply. Along with the fact i was not going to write a full trial back and forth the chapter was difficult enough as it was hahaha.

Ease The MInd

Chapter Summary

Now that Miranda is out of the picture, Hannibal can now continue his pursuit. But what happens when the man carves into a freshly healed wound without the right equipment. Will he be able to stitch the wound shut before Will bleeds out, or is he left with just a shell?

Chapter Notes

First off sorry again, but this time I have other reasons beside attention spans. Like how my seven year old computer decided it no longer wanted to well live. Yep that's right my laptop decided it wanted to die one day and I had to find a new one, luckily the story was saved and so were other files and programs for my old laptop. So this chapter was finished on my brand new laptop :). I also had other life issues mostly drama and craziness going on that sucked the life right out of me.
Second this is the second to last chapter! That's right the next chapter will be the last, I hope you all are still reading and sticking around for the conclusion. Anyway hope you all enjoy thank you the kudos and comments I read those as soon as they come in :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They say one of the most reckless acts a person can do was to stand in the middle of a raging storm. To stand perfectly still and take on the ferocious winds that could cause your body to stager for footing, threating to push you over like a bully on the playground and keep the hits coming, not giving you the chance to stand back on your feet. Wind that could rip down trees and carry away fences with ease. While the pelting heavy rains that could soak you to the bone and leave your body shivering, cut into your flesh like needles paired with the stampeding winds. While lighting flashed in the dark clouds that blocked out the crystal-clear sky and the thunder sang its baritone song which could be felt in those soaked bones. To endure all of mother nature’s chaos, to feel that raw energy that could either be built up over time or released at once without warning. Why someone would want to do something so foolish, so reckless was always beyond someone’s comprehension. The only answer that could come to mind was because of the thrill that could be injected into their brain and cause the heart to start pumping while adrenalin flows though their veins. Alighting their nerves leaving them with a desire for more. Causing them to become addicted to such a phenomenal experience, craving the next hit and begging mother nature to bless them with her untamable wickedness.

Hannibal Lecter had soon to be given his latest dosage of that beautiful drug. To feel those rampaging winds, the tear of near icicle cold rain drops which would tear into his skin like claws from a beast. To hear that thunderous melody that would radiate though his chest cavity and play with his own heartbeat changing it to match its pace. Then to finally see the crackle of lighting dance with crooked whimsy as it made those dark clouds its stage.

The well-dressed man watched with held together patience and inward placed amusement as he observed the oncoming storm that was about to be released inside his very office. All it would take would be a simple sentence and everything that was held together by thinning string, on the verge of snapping would come undone. It would be so easy, but it also would be very foolish to act so quickly and allow it all to happen. Because at the moment the bundle of soon to be released chaotic beauty was slowly pacing around his office. Far better than on the upper half, where the distance between himself and his main focus was clear and thought provoking. Hannibal was somewhat glad when Will did not take to the ladder when he came to his session, it was a risk that the profiler would. A risk so blatant that it had Hannibal pondering the idea of storing it away for their session and covering it up with a professionally sewed together lie to tell the man, if he was questioned. But he put that thought away when he decided not to act on it, instead just wait and see how it would play out. Because either way he would be given that storm in one form or another, Will was a walking raw nerve and Hannibal was craving to send an electric signal through the man. He only had to figure out how to administer the slight, but bone carving shock to the unexpected man. Waiting for the perfect time to strike when those now reinforced barriers were lowered, he only needed the slightest gap. But that also gave Hannibal another hurdle to go over, because he knew that Will would be waiting for the man to strike, he could tell.

Simply by the way Will walked around the office, not even paying attention to anything, of course his eyes would land on a figurine, a photo, maybe even one of the chairs. Where the thought of sitting down would scurry across his vast mind, but that thought would never be caught. Will would simply take in the object place it in his mind, file it away before his eyes moved on to the next object. Involuntarily taking inventory of his surroundings, as though it was the first time, he had stepped foot into the office. Hannibal watched as Will walked the grounds not a word being said between either one of them, they hadn't even exchange greetings. Hannibal opened his door and stepped aside for the other, not a sentence spoken, not a vowel pronounced, nothing. Not even a glance or tease of possible eye contact that the profile often shared with him more than anyone else. Will just took the opening like a well-trained dog and began to walk around the shared space. Watching the man, made Hannibal wonder for a few seconds if how Will viewed the space would face the same treatment as everything else since he had sowed himself that new suit. Would he act with far more caution and hostility, there were slight glimpses of that behavior last time. When Will took to the upper floor and nearly refused to participate in their dance, showing slight anger that could not be held forth for a long period because he did not have the mental energy to do so. Now though, by how he walked around the room, it showed that there was a promise to a larger impact when he was pushed.

While Hannibal silently studied Will from where he sat behind his desk, the profiler was waiting. Waiting for the man to open his mouth and make an unnoticed observation that only his scrutinizing eyes could pick up and dissect. To look into ways, he could unlock and remove even the most thought stretching observation out of it and make it sound like it was

all a subconscious cry for help that his mind was making. It was either that or the doctor would bless Will with a more blatant approach to start off the session, where his words were sharp and cutting. Leaving a wound that Will could either walk off or stop and nurse, making him an easier target for the man to attack. Both options were up in the air while he walked around the office space, his eyes landing on one object after the next, but never taking the time to acknowledge them.

I'm waiting for you to strike Doctor Lecter, though I am battle damaged I still have a fight in me. All you have to do is make the first attack, because I will assure I won't. I'm not stepping into another one of your well disguised traps that you have set around this office and I am not going to start this dance you somehow created with me. Will thought as his eyes landed on the fireplace, that like last time held a welcoming fire in its body, housing its playful flames and containing the small pops and embers that the fire sung out. The warmth that breathed out of the large fireplace and roamed around the room felt somewhat welcoming, but at the same time it also felt fake. Will had noticed the last fire the doctor had set up before his last visit, he knew that the man was trying to coax him into staying on the ground floor, but he did not walk towards its soft greeting. That day all he wanted was space between himself and Lecter. While he still gathered himself together and tested his newly enforced walls. That to his dismay did not hold up against the psychiatrist, but then again, did he really expect it to?

All it was ment to do at the time was to help him make it through the session and technically it did do that. Kind of. He still ended up buckling under the heavy questions, wincing at the skin peeling comments, and finally biting at the sharp observation. All reactions he wanted to avoid entirely, but still expected them to happen as soon as he had crossed the threshold, hence why he made a beeline for the ladder. Will wanted the distance, no, he required the distance during the time of basically reintroducing himself for the first time, to a place he should have already become familiar with. But even if he didn't basically go through with a hard reset with himself, he still did not feel all too comfortable with the office. It made him wonder if he ever would be and the more he dwindled on the thought the less it really bothered him, but at the same time it somewhat jarred a small portion of his mind. That by this point he should at least feel a little comfortable when he walked through that door and be led into different conversation with a man that he never thought once he would consider a friend.

Another thought which sometimes rattled in his already cracked mind, when there wasn't already a beehive of crazy going haywire in there. The idea of the impossible becoming possible happening for him. He really couldn't believe that he actually found some form of uncanny friendship in Lecter, that a part of him actually enjoyed their talks they shared, the way they could pick one another apart piece by piece without damaging the whole framed picture they occupied. It was sometime refreshing to be able to feel like there was a brain out there, a mind that could handle his. That could match his quirks with a reaction that handled them in a way that most couldn't. But then again Will had thought he found a mind like that, a personality that took him as a whole, oddities and all and didn't hold it against him. All that was the reason for the new form of protection and he had to remind himself of it. That's why he had to be more careful now that he had stepped back into this office, Lecter might still be working his way back in, but Will was not going to allow. He just couldn't take the risk especially after that heart wrenching mind twisting dream he suffered through. Waking up

with a hole reopened in his chest cavity and a longing for a person who was no longer there, someone he could once thought he understand and they understood him. But did he really understand them, or was he simply fooling himself with an idea of unattainable paradise? Another question that rained with acidic havoc on his mind and prodded at his damaged heart.

“I took notice that you weren’t at the trial when the verdict was given.” Lecter’s voice broke the still water like a stone being skipped across the surface before it sunk once it finally lost momentum. Will didn’t look over at the man, but he did falter in his movement; something Hannibal wanted to see happen.

“Jumping straight to the point I see.” Will responded as he continued his mindless wondering, his fingers skimming over the chair he often sat it, finger tips brushing up against authentic leather not losing motion, not getting caught on loose strands or defaults. Only the most high-end furniture in Doctor Hannibal Lecter’s office.

“Though we could go through the familiar motion of walking around the major topic, like we always do. Fall back into the similar pattern,” Hannibal said as he folded his hands on his desk, his eyes searching over Will’s back as the man made his way over to the one of the larger windows. Where he finally came to a stop. Hannibal knew the man was looking out the window, yes, his eyes were in that direction, yes, they flickered around the outside world, but Hannibal new the man really wasn’t looking, wasn’t seeing anything. Giving an opening the doctor could possibly sneak through, though he had to be somewhat cautious when it came to this. Like how Will knew about the small traps that laid around his office, Hannibal knew about the traps that Will had inside of his mind, that without a doubt had multiplied since Miranda. “I believe that is something that could be left for another time. It’s also my honest opinion that it might be best to start at the root of the issue that seems to be following you.”

Will looked over his shoulder at Hannibal and did not say a single word, his eyes looking over the well-dressed man and this time Hannibal knew that Will was actually seeing him. Taking in his words and assessing them, taking them apart to study under the bright light before actually acting on them.

Come now dear boy, you, and I both know that this will only be an endless cycle. The snake devouring its own tail, an endless cycle of repetitive behavior. To never reach the end goal without facing the harsh reality, that you will only end up causing damage to yourself. If I don’t cut deep into your wound like I plan on doing then how will you heal the correct way, my way. The way I want and the way you need it to be. Hannibal thought as he waited for Will to respond to his blatant approach of the situation. Will stood there for a second eyes dancing around the doctor, not landing on one part of his person for a fluttering second, before finally stopping. Landing close to his eyes, but not fully making complete connection only teasing at the possibility. Hannibal knew none the less that Will was caught in his words and the sudden sharp approach.

Will let out a quick lung deflating breath as he ran a hand over his mouth, before sticking it in his pants pocket. “Alright, then let us proceed.” He said as he gestured lightly with his free hand. Hannibal felt a slight pull at the corner of his lips, as he watched the other fold for him ever so slightly, but not fully and Hannibal wouldn’t have it any other way. Because if Will

gave up on putting up even the microscopic fight than where would their relationship ever truly be.

“So, are you going to enlighten me on why you chose to stop attending the trials after your time on the stand?” Hannibal asked, already knowing that he was not going to be given a complete answer.

“Didn’t see the point, I was already gutted while up there. No point in staying for the rest of the show.”

“That is one way to view things, but what about wanting to see the case to the end?” Hannibal probed seeing what would happen when he poked at Will’s sense of justice, the one nerve point that kept the man tied to that temporary badge that he often held close and also kept him going back to the field, even though everyone around him could see the damaged it was doing, including Will himself. Will simply shrugged at the answer, before turning his attention back to the window. The fight had begun, their dance had started, their music begun its second verse and Hannibal was ready to take the lead.

“Technically, all I ever do is point the team in the right direction and let them handle the rest. So I never really follow the case to the end.” Will answered his voice monotone as he stated a simple fact and as he did so, Hannibal found an opening in this new tactic that Will was presenting as he recalled what the man had told him back at the courthouse. How he was going to treat this as any other case. “The killer had been caught, justice had been delt.”

“Technically speaking, you’ve never held such a strong connection with a killer before, never had let someone inside your walls as you have done with Miss. Rhettford.” Though it was the blatant truth that would chip at Will, it still tasted bitter on Hannibal’s tongue to admit out loud. To know another killer out there had managed to step so close to Will’s heart so quickly and left her claw marks on it before he ever could. That fact still caused something vile to stir deep inside his chest, to brush itself against his bones and threaten to taint his bloodstream all over again, like a shark under the dark waters of the ocean, never to be seen until its fin breeched the surface. It pushed the need to exterminate it, to make the feeling as a whole disappear so it could never violate him again. Now with Will back in his office he had the opportunity and he was going to take it with greed, greed he often held himself back from indulging. Because that was going to be the only way to set the chessboard back to its original state with perhaps more of his pieces taking over the battlefield.

Will stayed silent for a few minutes, not a sound rippled through the office as Hannibal waited for something to come out of the other. But there was nothing. The man could have been mistaken as a statue with how little he moved, not even a hitch in his breath at the mention of her name. The complete opposite of what happened last time. Where was the boiling wrath that he oh so cruelly teased Hannibal with. Where was the promise of a raging storm that entered the office and showed promising signs of tasteful addicting chaos? It could not have disappeared, smothered like the teasing flame it was. The doctor knew he had to press further, those jaws would be pried back open, those fangs flashed once again, he just had to keep talking. Keep picking at the cracks and chip away at the armor all over again until those raw nerves that Will flashed him back at the courtroom were once again in front of him. But it also had him questioning what had to of happened to have those barriers raised so

very high and unmoving. What took place to have that once tasteful sight suddenly be taken from him? Hannibal had to figure it out if he was going to move forward in all of this.

“Doesn’t matter in the end the Black Widow was caught.” Will finally spoke as he stepped closer towards the window, eyes watching the newly formed snowflakes flutter down and gather amongst the rest on the ground. Creating a blanket of pure white, Will wonder if he stared at the snow long enough he might begin to see large paw prints.

“I believe it does matter,” Hannibal pressed as he seen the opportunity to wedge himself in, Will hadn’t shot the conversation down, in fact he unknowingly added onto it. Even though Hannibal knew he ment to end it right then and there with such a short response. Not seeing the blatant opening, his mind wasn’t as alert as he thought it was. “You had lowered your barriers for someone, took chances by stepping out of your comfort zone only for in the end be hurt by that person you once held close.” Hannibal watched as Will’s head slightly turned, clear indicator that he was listening and Hannibal’s words that were once again coaxing him back to their conversation. “You want to move on, it’s clear to see that, but it is best if we discuss this.”

“And if I am not up for discussion, if I want to move on from all of this?” Will challenged and once again caused Hannibal to fight down the smile that begged to play at his lips. As he was once again given a glimpse of that stubborn behavior that he seemed to only stand coming from the profiler and no one else.

“Though it may sound tempting out loud, simply move past all this and expect things to go back to normal,” Hannibal began to explain in a more opened tone, “we both know that is not a possibility. Normality is no longer an option.” *It never was for you.* “Things cannot go back to the way they were I’m sad to say.”

Will let out a deep sigh as he rolled his neck and shoulders, muscles growing stiff as they felt the pressure of such a heavy topic, it finally gifted Hannibal a reaction he could feed from. “Can’t prey to a god that you know isn’t there.” Will said his voice laid on a thin edge of either staying docile or exploding with hidden emotion. Hannibal found himself craving the other as he subtly licked his lips with the tip of his tongue and leaned slightly forward in his chair. Ready for the meal to start.

“But yet you were still inflicted by wounds left behind when you did not show complete faith in it.” Hannibal replied as he waited for Will to join in the slow to start conversation. “Gifting you with proof of such deity. That should speak quite loudly to your lack of faith,” Hannibal tilted his head and pursed his lips only slightly, “or confuse you greatly.”

“Oh, it speaks loudly, in fact it’s yelling.” Will said as he slid his hands out of his pockets, so he could cross his arms over his chest while he continued to look out the window.

“And what is this deity yelling?” Hannibal watched as Will took a large breath through his nose, as he came up with the words that he was spoken to by the deity that held the topic of their discussion.

“It’s accusing me of being another Icarus flying too close to the sun. Trying to obtain something unreachable.” Will spoke his words near lifeless, as the floated-on air with ease of

a burnt feather and held only a small amount of emotion. Something close to defeat and acceptance of what had happened to him. That the dream he felt was just that, a dream, an illusion of a life that could never belong to him. “Something that did not belong to me.”

“But unlike Icarus, you were not given a warning on the dangers that laid in front of you.” Hannibal shifted in his seat slightly, as he focused on the more coaxing approach, using words that could smooth the edges that Will still wore. Instead of attacking the defenses that Will had put up.

“I still should have known better.” Hannibal found himself drawn towards the semi vague response.

Should have known better? Now is not the time to be vague, do not tease me in the slightest. Not while the you have left yourself opened. An opening that will not last long. It is clear that subtly is not going to keep that jaw of yours loose and mind free to observe.

“Are you referring to possible past relationships that have left you with a damaged heart?” Hannibal probed as he witnessed his opening once again and began to slither through it. “Tell me Will,” He continued as he finally stood up and moved around his desk, but only to stand in front of it. Still playing into the act of distance that Will wanted to maintain even though they both knew did not exist. “How vivid did you imagine a future with Miss. Rhettford,” Hannibal tilted his head slightly, “did you imagine a house with a white picket fence. Perhaps the sound of small footsteps prattling around on hardwood floors?”

Those even spoken words felt like a jagged blade cruelly stabbing into a part of Will, that he thought could not become anymore damaged. It took every ounce of self-control in him not to show a reaction. *I know your game doctor; I didn’t give you enough of a reaction when we had begun. Didn’t dance when you pulled at my strings like you hoped for. Now you are trying to get me to bite you once again. Keep it up and soon you’ll be seen as a masochist, though that image had already been planted in my mind long before this. Too bad for you, I don’t plan on gifting you anymore of this show you are hoping for. You can try and I know you will, but the reaction you will get oh trust me Lecter you won’t enjoy.* Will thought with sharp bitterness that wanted to taint unspoken words that he had the urge to speak. But he knew that was what Lecter wanted and he had no intension on feeding that hunger that came off of the doctor like the heat from the roaring fire. It licked at his back and made the hair on the back of his neck stand up. Alerting him the possible danger that filled the room.

“Can one dream something so peaceful built on false intentions and dark meanings.” Will replied, not giving into the attack like Lecter hoped to happen and even though his back was turned he could feel the shift in the room. Like how Lecter spoke, it was subtle with a predatory tone, a snake in the tall grass slithering by looking for something to sink its fangs into. The snake spotted the observing mongoose who called the tall grass its domain and now they stared at one another. Neither making the first move as they waited for the other to strike first. But what would the snake do when it realized that the mongoose did not have it in him to even put up that much a fight when the battle did start or if the mongoose bared its neck just to entice the reptile into latching on first. That was something that pulled at Will’s mind and tempted to try this tactic just to see what Lecter would do.

“Miss. Rhettford gave you a glimpse of a reality that was never there. Leading you down a path decorated with false signs, keeping you blind to the dangers that were waiting for you when you reached the destination, she had laid out far before you were ever aware.”

“Miranda fed me lies that she knew would keep me blind and like all who were struck by cupid’s sharp arrow. I did not question the wound that was inflicted.”

“And now that the arrow has been removed,” Hannibal began, shifting ever so slightly, hoping that the sound of his movements might draw Will’s attention back to him. So that he was no longer looking out the window, but the ploy did not work, Will’s eyes remained on the window. “Has the blindness that plagued you also been lifted?”

“They say hindsight is twenty-twenty.”

“Yes, but that refers to the past, we are talking in the present.” Hannibal responded a small trace of agitation trickled over his spine as Will still stayed focused on the window and did not yet bite at him. Here he had practically rolled up his sleeve in order to give the man a surface to bite at and it did nothing, it made Hannibal contemplate his next response as he mapped out a possible route to take. All while Will did the same thing.

“Are we though? It seems this conversation is teetering between present and past. Speaking in a way that can be considered for either point of time.” Will said not following the path that Lecter might have been forming for him, thinking it was time he went down his own path for a while and if Lecter happened to follow him then so be it.

“If that is how you see it, we can speak both of the past or present.” Hannibal said making a slight motion with his hand, still not being granted Will’s sight. “If your mind still lingers in the past, then let us focus there, if it wants to stay isolated in the present then so be it.”

“You linger in the past too long you neglect the present and future,” Will spoke his voice carried a slight weight to it as his eyes traveled up towards the top of the window that still held most of the man’s gaze; a gaze Hannibal craved to be pointed towards him. “Yet if we focus only in the present, we risk to lose the past and we blind ourselves to the possibility of the future.”

“That is why there needs to be a balance that one must find to help keep the focus on all three. So, there is no risk of becoming blind or being completely lost.” Hannibal spoke as he leaned away from his perch and began to move towards Will, his footsteps intentionally loud to not startle the other. “And I believe at this moment you are attempting to force yourself too far into the future and act as though the past never inflicted you. That you are not currently baring wounds left behind from cupid’s misguided arrow.”

Before Will could stop the words that left his mouth, before his mind and tongue could make a connection. He heard his words before he even realized they escaped him and gained a life he could not take away from them. As they tore through the office like a bird looking for an escape to the outside world where it was desperate to find solace in a tree, where it belonged. “Was the arrow really misguided?” He had asked, the question not aimed exactly at Hannibal, but more himself. Because what if he was ment to be struck by that arrow, to be teased and taunted with the idea of a normal life with another being. To be given the experience of a life

outside of the macabre world that called out to him both at the night's life and the breaking dawn of day. That perhaps there was a world that he could set foot in where he was not assaulted by blood and death, all he had to do was keep looking for it. But how could he keep looking when he still felt so utterly blind.

"I believe it was," Hannibal answered, knowing where Will's still cracked heart was leading his healing mind and he knew he had to take care of that. In a way that would resemble putting a wounded bird out of its misery, instead of trying to heal the fragile animal it would be so much easier and quicker to simply snap its neck. "Because what you felt while with Miss. Rhettford was not towards her, but towards a persona she had made in order to fool you. To help her hide away from the searching eyes that followed the trail of blood she spread."

"I know her initial intention was to blind me, she confessed to that." Will said as his mind went back to the interrogation room. Watching with a freshly wounded heart and destroyed trust, his mind scrambling to heal and preserve itself as quickly as possible. "She succeeded in fact," Will added with a slight astonishment as he dropped his arms and rested his hands on his hips, breath slightly raised to give away a small tell of agitation he still felt for being betrayed.

Something quickly caught Hannibal's attention, like one of Will's well-crafted fishing lures. That floated in the water, its feathers flowing in the currant as its colorful body shined like a beacon. Tempting for the prey it sought to catch and impale with the hidden sharp hook and impale it did. Because the doctor found himself caught one a specific word that he knew Will only said with no real intention, the easily look over word now sat on a pedestal in the Hannibal's mind and he could see this soon to be mistake be used in his favor.

"Initial intention?" Hannibal shifted in his stance as he let the words hang in the air for a moment. "Care to elaborate what you mean by that Will?"

"Come again?" Will asked as he finally looked over his shoulder towards Hannibal, his eyebrows knitted together displaying the confusion he felt. This gave Hannibal a nice dosage of amusement, knowing that now he had taken Will be surprise and could claim control of this conversation. That had succeeded into making the younger man finally focus truly on him once again and not he window.

"You said that her initial intention was to blind you, and if I recall initial means."

"I know what the word means." Will quickly cut in as he turned more to face the man, a slight hint of frustration on his face and this is what Hannibal wanted, no he needed. To see Will become agitated to feel that storm that was whirling around inside him trying desperately to get out and be free amongst the living. It was now finding cracks and slowly leaking through and Hannibal knew that he had the right tools to cause those cracks to splinter out and become larger

"Then you would understand my curiosity on why you would use such a word, when I thought it was agreed upon the Miss. Rhettford's goal was to deceive you."

A huff of air escaped through Will's nose, he really wasn't all that surprised that Lecter had caused something he felt was so minuscule just a word, yet the other man had caught it and he seemed to refuse to want to keep a tight grasp on it. Whatever it was at the moment, Will knew it was probably fighting, struggling in the man's grasp and a part of him wanted to keep it that way.

"She did deceive me, she stated to Jack that her goal was to blind his prize seeing eye dog," Hannibal watched as Will made air quotes around the label he was called and he felt a tingle of amusement to see the other becoming more alive in his office. Those were the signs he wanted to see happening, no more would he have to find small scrapes of nourishment off of Will's still form. "And like I said she succeeded." The last word was pushed through nearly clenched teeth with anger giving them momentum and venom making them slick.

"That does not answer my question, when asked about your word choice." Hannibal pointed out as he took a silent step forward and he watched as Will ran his hand over his mouth, before placing that hand on his hip again. He was growing slightly irritated, restless, it would be only a moment of time before the man began to start his pace.

"It was a slip of the tongue." Will quickly supplied as he rested his hands back on his hips and he could feel his fingertips wanting to dig into the leather of his belt, as a low heat of frustration began to boil in the pit of his stomach. He knew that Lecter would want to probe some more, especially after the stunt he had pulled back at the courthouse followed by the fact he never came back for the trail. Will realized he had practically set himself up as a one man show and Lecter was the only one in the audience. He went back to stare out the window, at least out there, there were a slight semblance of openness while he felt the walls of the already spacious office slowly begin to close in on him.

"Nothing is a simple slip of the tongue when it comes to our discussions," Hannibal easily spoke, subtly calling Will out on his blatant cover up that could hold the truth as well as a strainer holding water. "Now what made you say that simple word?" Hannibal asked narrowing his eyes; clear he wasn't at all pleased that Will went back to looking out that window, as he continued to dig for the truth that hid under so many layers of misdirection.

Will bit the inside of his cheek until the tender muscle softly cried out in pain, only then did he ease up on the pressure he was administrating; not wanting to puncture the tissue again. He fought with instinct to close his eyes; only for a moment to let Lecter's statement sink in. Because he knew if he did his mind would feed him images of Miranda. Her smile, the way she held herself and how it shifted so seamlessly especially in front of him. The way she could turn from hard as stone to, soft as a fur coat in a blink of an eye, that was something that drawn Will towards he in the first place. When he first watched the shift happen when she answered her phone in the café, where everything started, where her trap was set in place. Soon his mind drifted away from that scene like it did not appreciate the idea of thinking so harshly about her, like it only wanted to remember the times where everything felt real. Will found himself remembering how she slowed danced with him. The way her body felt gliding with the soft motions under his hold while they were pressed together, heartbeats playing their own rhythm that still synced with the soft jazz that serenaded them. As the world around them disappeared and only left them behind. Her head resting on his shoulder as she held on

to him, while his arms still wrapped around her to hold her close, his head resting on top of hers, a moment of shared vulnerability.

Then he would see flashes of her eyes, the way they looked while she sat behind that metal table with her wrists cuffed after she just revealed everything there was behind the Black Widow. When she sat alone and soon began to speak about everything there was behind her, Miranda Rhettford and who she was while with him. Those eyes that he once found himself easily becoming lost in that were glistening with unshed tears, tears that later Will found himself almost regretting not being able to gently wipe away. Because he knew that deep down in both his heart and mind that those tears held the truth, that she had grew just as close to him as he had with her. Which crashed against his mind, like a wounded beast unable to gain balance as it swayed around refusing to fall to the ground, refusing to kneel. Because he also knew he should not still hold those types of emotions, because it would be like holding broken glass and slowly applying pressure to his grip. It was self-harm and he knew it.

Yet to confuse him even more on how he should truly feel about his past relationship his mind would feed him a fantasy that would never become a reality, yet in the past it might of held a soft possibility. Miranda in a wedding dress, that she would have designed herself, standing at the alter with a bouquet in her hands, while she waited for him. Will could still see the dream painted behind his closed eyes as vividly as the first night he was cursed with it, how beautiful she looked, how her hands felt holding his face as his body began to lose its struggle against those golden chains that tightened around him slowly and be lost in that soft warmth that lulled his aching mind to a caring bliss. It all still roamed his mind like a dense fog that the moment you thought it cleared it would rise from the ground all over again.

Will knew he should have fought harder to clear that fog, yet he found himself longing to join it, to feel that weight surround him and feel those phantom emotions all over again. But he knew better, he kept those once welcomed emotions at bay for so long, yet he felt himself growing tired of the battle. He wanted to slip away just for a second and the want slowly turned into a need. It brought a form of frustration that he could never keep lit inside of him that somehow also brought another form of frustration that outweighed the other. Making Will feel both overwhelmed and underwhelmed, it had him wondering what would happen if he released his grip, he had had on the door he held shut to that part of himself. Let it open only for a few seconds, just to see what would happen. Would he drown or swim, be consumed entirely or maybe only half devoured. What would be left would be what he truly felt and that was what he sought to find out, because now his own emotions were a stranger to him.

Hannibal stood there in silence as he waited for a reply to his question, but Will did not utter a single word. There was no snarky comeback, no monotone misdirection, or an answer hidden in a statement. The profiler simply stood there, back facing him, once again drawn back to his mind. It irked the doctor, to know that Miranda could still draw Will's attention away from him. The lamb still licked at the first wolf's bit marks that damaged it's body.

I know she still haunts that graveyard you have built in your mind Will. Another grave amongst the many that you keep inside, your own personal array of ghosts to haunt you in the secluded nights and crowded days. Now here you are once again roaming those tainted grounds filled with corpses that you brought justice down upon. Do you need help leaving

those rows of tombstones, I know one still has a tight hold on that leash she had put around your neck. Pulling at the collar until your lungs can no longer take in the air that they scream out for, while you try, but pitifully fail to free yourself, because you and I both know that you are no longer putting up an adequate fight, it is time to sever that control she has and the only way is with a sharp blade that I am more than proud to hold. Hannibal thought as he waited for Will to make a move, but he could feel their dance coming to the end and he was still far too greedy to let that happen. It had been far too long for his taste and he was not going to let Will go so easily. Hannibal could feel the bird in his hand put up a struggle, clear it was willing to put up a fight to keep its small pathetic life. Now was the time to snap its delicate neck once and for all.

"Tell me Will, since you are still conflicted with the emotions that haunt you," Hannibal took in a subtle breath, that was covered by the sound of the fire. "Could perhaps one of those emotions might have been the delicate flicker of *love*?" That word alone could made Hannibal begin to feel ill, the sickness thrashed against the inside of his chest and threaten to tear its sharpen toxin soaked claws into his heart. Until nothing was left but a hollow beast that once held some semblance of being whole. The mere idea of Will being in love with that woman was a far more gruesome than anything he could construct with his hands. But it was a question that needed to be asked, he had to expose the wound that the profiler still covered and hid. How else was he supposed to heal it and make sure that the younger man would form back into a more suitable image of the self that Hannibal knew he could only draw out. The man that lied buried under societies heavy gaze and unrealistic standard that did not nourish Will like Hannibal knew he could, but in fact starved him. Lead him astray in a world that tried to shape the man that obvious was above all that and held those marks of being bent and cracked over and over again. Until he could come up with a position that showed compliance, but in reality, it showed how damaged he was left behind.

The question struck some place unknown in Will, he could feel a sharp cold slowly begin to spread out through his chest as it consumed him while the invading question embedded in his being. Spreading out its thorny roots until every inch of him was screaming in silent pain. Will's fingers itched to claw at his flesh with blunt nails that he would force to puncture his skin in order to grip the feeling and rip it out of him. Only then would the pain slow down and become a thumping sensation he could go home and heal. *Heal with what exactly Graham?* Will thought to himself. *Nothing has worked, nothing has helped heal the now infected wounds that refuse treatment.* Everything he tried to accomplish did little to nothing, Alana had been insisting on watching his pack while he went fishing for a few days. Will had even joined Beverly, Jimmy and Zeller during their Friday night after work bar sessions; as if he actually had a choice in the matter. Beverley practically dragged him out of his classroom by the arm and threw him in the passenger seat of her car, she did not exactly take no for answer. But if she had Will wouldn't have discovered that Beverly like himself could hold her share of alcohol, he witnessed her toss back two bottles, a shot or two and still be able to walk a straight line. Discovering this made Will curious about how the other two would act and Will was both surprised and not at the same time. It all started when the two tried to "cheer" him up over his break up, starting off with that over used saying of other fish in the sea, which opened the door for Jimmy; who with a few drinks in him turned sentimental. The way he just went on and on about his own love life and how it took him a while until he found his missing piece saying this while sipping on his fourth drink. Zeller was the opposite, instead of focusing on his own acts of dating he tried to build Will up, giving him halfhearted

complements to help build up his self-esteem all while he pointed out any woman, his buzzed minded deemed to be Will's type, only to stop when Beverly stepped in. But even after that, Will still felt that ache and nothing was taking it away. *Perhaps I am just destined to carry the infection, let it spread through my body and let it kill everything inside.*

"Can you repeat the question?" Will finally spoke his voice returning to that hollow sound as if it tried to betray a more docile feeling, but Hannibal knew better. He knew something more lived behind that emotion and now was the time to grab that emotion with a tight unyielding grip and drag it out of the profiler. It was going to be a struggle, a harsh one, the emotion was going to lash out like a wild animal. Wanting to damage whoever that dared to capture it with twisting thrashing limbs and snapping teeth. Aiming to free itself, to bury back into the cavern it had originally hid itself in, but Hannibal was ready for this fight. He craved it in his core, because he needed to see Will lash out, in order to clear the slate and so that he could start reconstruction.

"Did you perhaps feel love for Miss. Rhettford?" Hannibal responded as he began to wait, already noticing the slight changes in Will. The way his fingers began to dig into his hips, how his shoulders stiffened, and the way his jaw began to clench and unclench. He was becoming restless, soon he wouldn't be able to stand in one place.

"How can one feel love for an illusion, doctor?" Will said his voice held the subtle hint of a warning, telling Lecter he better watch out because as of that moment he was standing on cracked ice. Any moment those cracks will branch out under the other man's weight and if he fell through then Will would let him, watch as the cold water swallowed Lecter hole and not do anything about it. Leave him to drown in his mistake and curiosity.

"You call it an illusion, yet when I did the same you questioned my words." Hannibal took a slight step forward, he found the crack in Will's armor and he was beginning to slip his way in. "I recall you doing something similar when I spoke of treating the trial as any other, you were quick to strike my words down." Hannibal watched as Will became more restless, his hands dropping from his hips and his fists; like his jaw, began to clench and unclench. "But soon you were mimicking my words and following advice," Hannibal tilted his head slightly, "why is that?"

"You're the psychiatrist, why don't you tell me."

"You are looking for cover, you were damaged and now whenever the opportunity to hide and wait for the topic to pass you are taking it." Will could no longer stand still, Hannibal watched as the other began to pace around the room. Fists clenching and unclenching while his eyes aimed more at the floor, though they tried to stay hidden from any trap of eye contact that Hannibal wanted to make, the doctor could easily see the anger brewing behind them. Hannibal knew he had to keep going, he was getting close to his goal one more push, perhaps well gripped pry and the other will becoming undone at the seams. "Not letting how you truly feel about this situation be addressed, much like a wounded animal snapping at the hand that wants to help, content with simply licking its wound. You are trying to find quick fixes that can only heal so much before the damage reemerges, instead of seeking out a permanent solution."

“Perhaps permanent solutions are not ment for me.” Will responded as he continued to walked around the office, agitation in each of his footsteps. “Maybe, just maybe I am ment to suffer from cupid’s wound that way I don’t fall for that arrow’s design again.”

“You do not wish to be healed?”

Will stopped for a second and took in the question, because the answer wasn’t no, because in truth he did want to be healed. He wanted the hurt, the ache to go away. But the more he tried to heal his wounds the worse they became. It came to the point he found himself wishing for a form of numbness to wash over him, he wanted to turn off all emotions that whirled inside of him, that buzzed under his skin like a faulty television set. He just wanted... “I want things to go back to normal, to where people stared at me as the man who could slip into the mind of psychopaths, as they wondered if one day I might snap.” Will took in a deep breath though his nose and had it turn into a deep wounded sigh. “Now they stare at me as the man who had his heart trapped by one. Now those eyes that felt like pin needles sticking int my skin, they stare at me with either disgust or *pity*.” The word pity dripped with destain, the way his lips curled back to reveal teeth. It was delicious.

“But as we discussed earlier things simply cannot go back to normal.” Hannibal once again spoke with a cool calm voice that was disguised to help draw out that building fire that fought to be released from it’s lantern like cell and be able to feed upon its surroundings that Hannibal had meticulously set out for it, he had laid out a fest and all Hannibal had to do was to tempt that fire out. “I would have thought you understood that.”

“I do understand that.” Will mumbled.

“I don’t believe you do; you said so yourself. You yearns for everything to go back to the way it ways,” Hannibal took a deep breath though his nose as he took another step forward. He had to keep pushing, Will was so close to breaking. He could see the cracks now shattering, splintering out. All it would take was one more application of well-placed pressure and everything would come undone. “It can’t though.”

“Don’t you think I don’t know that,” Will said as he snapped his head to look at the doctor, fists clinched so hard that they were shaking, and Hannibal had to hold back the emotion of awe that flowed through him like a rich wine as he took in the sight of that aggressive anger, he could see the chain that Will held around the emotions neck begin to break and that beast of a feeling was pointed right at him. His eyes filled with frustration, with anger, with unshed tears that slowly began to build up with every deep chest expanding breath. “Don’t you think I don’t understand that nothing is going to be exactly the same as it was months ago.” There it was the heat, the fire, the chaos. With each word that poured out of the agents mouth the harder Hannibal felt his heart beating, the storm was surrounding him and he desired more. “Before I was called into investigate that case,” there was the crack of lighting, the boom of thunder, “before I met her in that coffee shop.” More he needed more of that raging storm that Will was producing, Hannibal found himself craving more of that anger that Will tried so desperately to keep inside and now was failing right in front of Hannibal. “Before I fell...”

The room grew silent, the only sound came the sharp pops from the fire place as the two men just stood still. Neither one dared to break the ice that slowly formed over them. Will stared at Hannibal with slightly wide eyes as he scurred to understand the word that tried to escape

his mouth. He could feel his heart beating in his chest and its beat rang in his ears in a painful volume, as his breath grew heavy as if he had just ran a mile. His nerves were all over the place attacking each other while wanting to lash out at whatever dared to provoke them further. Will felt a slight sharp pain in his palms and he realized he had dug his nails too tightly into his palms, but he didn't really care at the moment. Because he was being given a stimulation that wasn't pointed towards his heavy heart beat or agitative nerves.

Will stared at Hannibal and waited in the silence for the man to say something, perhaps an I told you so or another sharp tipped question. But all the older man did was stare right back at him, with a look Will tried to wrap his thoughts around. His eyes were only slightly wide as if in shock, yet the rest of his facial features did not portray shock, if Will had to guess it laid on the outskirts of intrigued mixed with something hidden below that. What that other emotion that the doctor kept hidden Will knew it was pure, something strong and it fought to get out, but Lecter had it tightly held down. It made Will's empathy flare like a newly lit match and it wanted to reach out and try to uncypher it, claim it as his own so he could understand what Lecter was hiding. Yet Will found himself holding back, because a part of him wanted Lecter to keep it to himself for once, Will knew he was acting like a live wire with the threat of acting out of pure emotions, he felt raw and exposed. Prying eyes were diving into exposed flesh and tearing at it with ugly greed, every inch of him hated the feeling and he had Lecter to thank for it.

How dare you. Hannibal found himself thinking with enough poisonous bitterness that could kill the whole FBI as he stared back at the profiler. All while Will battled to keep himself together, Hannibal was facing something similar as he took in the slip. He analyzed the words that Will quickly cut off, going over them in his mind as he fought to keep himself in check making sure he gave the empath only little to feed on. *How dare you let yourself succumb to such an insulting act of manipulation, to let yourself be blinded like that is quite disappointing and to hear that one word nearly fall from your mouth is enough to send me into some form of rage. To think I let you talk about her in my office for those months, gave you a space where you could let out all those thoughts and wonders about he. Where I helped you build some form of self-esteem that way you did not question your own worth and this is how you repay me. By nearly letting it slip that you might have loved her, do you even know what that delicate yet powerful emotion feels like? Do you know what it is like to feel its haze like touch and sickly burning warmth that makes you question your even being? Because I know for certain you do not. It's impossible you could have loved her, to have fallen for such a ploy to let your empathy blind you into feeling something so clearly...* Hannibal stopped his storming thoughts as a more eerie thought crept inside his mind and had all those thoughts lower their tone. *Unless you managed to, of course it seems once more Rhettford and I do share a similar trait in one another.*

Hannibal blinked a few times as he collected himself, taking a breath through his nose. Resetting himself in order to force himself behind his mask and hold it there. "Tell me Will, did Miss. Rhettford confess to you?" Hannibal spoke and it took every ounce of well-formed control to keep his voice smooth. Will scrunched his eyebrows, clearly confused by such a question.

"What are you trying to suggest?" Will found himself asking and Hannibal took a slight step forward and Will found himself taking a slight step back. Not wanting to share his space with

the man, but the more he moved so did Lecter. He could feel something coming from the man and he did not like how it felt, it was like a warm pressure that wanted to trap him in its presence. It hid behind a mask of good intention, but Will could see the mask and he knew what it wanted. It sought out to hold him down and place a false sense of comfort on him, all while it pried his mouth open and ripped out what he tried to keep caged inside. The more Lecter approached the more Will took his steps back, to keep out of the aura and let his nerves rest while still exposed.

“I’m simply curious, after the show of mercy back at the courthouse while you were on the stand, how you never really disproved Alana’s claim of Miss. Rhettford’s feelings towards you, right after you and Miss. Rhettford shared that brief act of eye contact that had sent you to take cover. Paired with perhaps other outside forces that must have taken place while you two were a couple.” Hannibal kept approaching Will, finding small intakes of amusements watching as Will tried to retreat only to find there really was nowhere to go. He had Will right where he wanted him. “It has one wonder, if that by some miracle, if Miss. Rhettford began to feel something far more than what she had led on towards you as well.” Hannibal stopped. “Am I not correct?” He asked raising an eyebrow and waited to for Will to respond.

But Will did not respond as he simply stared at the man and he felt something vicious curl inside of his chest, before he felt it slowly die down, a beast struck down before its time. He knew he did not have a response to such a heavy question, he did not want to confess to Lecter what Miranda had told him. Because her words were his and his alone, her words were soft and delicate and he knew if he handed them to Lecter. The man would simply turn them into something they were not, manipulate the situation and point it back to his empathy going rogue on him, because for once he knew what emotions were his and his alone. Tired of everyone trying to explain to him what emotions did and did not belong to him, but another effect that was a *part* of him. It was not the case because Will knew deep down what was the truth. Will clenched and unclenched his jaw in slow dying agitation, not sure if he should revive the emotion or let it slip away, like so many of his negative emotions that were looked down upon. That was when he realized something warm slowly drip down his cheek, a soft caress that was uninvited, but he did not turn it away, with a curious hand, his fingertip touched the spot of warmth, which rested against the rest of his heat boiling skin. Before he slowly looked down at his hand, not hesitant to see what he knew was there, yet he felt as though he was discovering the effect for the first time as he looked at the damp fingertip. He had no more fight in him and he was not willing to take any more damage.

“I believe our session is over Doctor Lecter.” Will plainly replied as he looked up at the doctor with a blank look in his eyes, no emotion to be seen, to be dissected and he did not wait for the man to respond as he left the office. Will had enough, he was tired, he was damaged, he needed space.

Hannibal stood there simply awestruck at what just took place. Out of all the possibilities that he could conjure up, Will simply walking out before their session was over, was not one of them. It made the man for the first time in a long while ponder his actions as he stood there in the silence of his office. The only presence was his own as everything began to settle down and become still as he stared at the door Will had just walked out of. His words replying on loop and only then did the signs become less enjoyable and more serious. Hannibal soon began to realize he had achieved, what he had set out to do, he had pushed Will into snaping.

He had forced those cracks to splinter and break that shell, leaving him exposed and instead of being pleased with the outcome, Hannibal once again became greedy and sought out more. The results he thought would taste savory and decadent on his palate something he would cherish, tasted like ash. Hannibal was not satisfied and it pained him to think of the outcome of his own actions. A feeling not strange, but often never experienced in a long, long time. It was an old suit he kept buried in the back of his closet that he attempted to keep hidden away. So, it could never see the light of the sun, but here that feeling was wrapping itself around him and he hated it. He had no control of this emotion as it claimed his thoughts all while he stared at the door.

Hannibal let out a sigh and began to walk over to his desk. Where he did not find the desire to sit, he simply stood by it and gently pushed one of the fine pens with the tip of his finger, only to watch it roll to the center; something Will often did during their more relaxed sessions. *Even locked behind bars and removed from the public eye, you still have managed to stay as a thorn in my side Rhettford.* He thought as he watched as the pen came to a halt. The doctor knew he had to repair what he had just damaged, fix it so Will would once again walk down the path he wanted and have room to walk along his side. He looked over at the fire and like the office it had died down, barely a flame left on the charred logs. Soon Hannibal found himself walking over towards the fire place as he continued to look at the depleting fire and the logs remains. He had to come up with some form of a plan, but what could possibly tempt the man back to him. Hannibal held his eyes on the fire, as a passing thought of placing another perhaps a sturdier log, one that would last far longer than the current, so the fire could keep burning and no longer focus on what was slowly diminishing under its flame. That was when a stronger thought entered his mind as he watched the flam flicker. *Perhaps it won't be so difficult to snip that leash off of you, all I need is to refocus your attention on what is around you. Fill that slot, Rhettford has left behind that is still torn open and is refusing to heal. That is all you need dear boy is to refocus and see what was the right choice the whole time. No longer stumble around abandoned and blind. Not now that I have free range.*

The drive to Wolf Trap was oddly becoming like second nature for the good doctor, what was once a visit now and then along with the ploy to investigate the other's surrounding under not so good intentions was becoming something more. It was almost like a need to just step into Will's little isolation and make a mark without the other's knowledge, to slowly etch himself into the surroundings in a more intentional way. Unlike how Will did with Hannibal's own personal spaces with no real intention, accidently leaving a mark in Hannibal's life, that the killer would bare, presenting it with ease and adoration pleased with himself. Knowing that he had made it to where Will could leave such an etch without realizing it, now he had plans to keep those etches coming. To present Will with the opportunity to leave more traces of himself on the doctor. He had put carful thoughts into this next wave of drawing the man back to him for a few days. Giving the man the space, he would need to lick his wounds and repair what Hannibal had broken. Before even allowing the thought of letting the man near him again.

Hannibal pulled up to the farmhouse, his tires alerting to which ever canine companion of his presents when they drove onto the gravel. But unlike last time no dogs came around the house to investigate with caution, before that caution turned into a friendly greeting. Instead, Hannibal was greeted with nothing but the snow and silence of the winter woods. He waited

for a few moments giving a well measured amount of time, because he knew Will must have noticed him pull up. Him waiting would only give the man a moment or two to prepare himself for the inevitable. Hannibal stepped out of his Bentley and the first to greet him was the crisp cold that the air carried off the snow, that was only disturbed by three outside sources. Tire marks, foot prints, and paw prints, everything else was untouched, giving Hannibal an idea of how far Will would often roam outside the space of his house since the last gift of fallen snow, which what Hannibal had gather really wasn't that far. But now among those many tracks Hannibal was soon going to leave his own as he made his was over to the front door. His footsteps making slight sound when the snow would crunch under his weight and those crunches turned into muted clicks as he walked up and onto the porch. Which was odd to only hear his footsteps when he thought at least one of the dogs would give out a bark, but still nothing.

Perhaps my timing is off, maybe he's not home and decided to go on a little get away to take in more solitude. If I recall he often did speak of a reserved ice fishing spot only an hour's drive from here. Hannibal glanced around his surroundings, he walked over to the porch railing and leaned over slightly to catch the sight of Will's barn and he noticed the front end of the Volvo peeking out. *So, you are home.* Hannibal thought as he turned back to the front of the house and he made his way over to the front door. Where he barely had time to raise his fist to knock, before the door was opened, taking him somewhat off guard. There Will stood, neutral expression unlike last time he did not seem surprised to see the doctor standing on his front porch, he almost seemed as though he expected it in some way.

"Doctor Lecter." Will spoke voice monotone, near almost to the point of being dull just like the small splashes of grey that hid in his eyes. As he stood in his doorway, one hand on the open door clear that he wasn't going to open his house to the man any time soon, clearly wanting to keep Hannibal out for as long as he saw fit. Which to Hannibal's guess would be the whole conversation if he let Will attempt his goal.

"Hello Will," Hannibal greeted in return with a relaxed smile, that showed he was pleased to see the other. "I see you are using formal titles again. Falling back on old habits are we." Hannibal responded with a slight movement of his head to show intrigue, as he wondered how far the barrier Will had built between the two of them stood and how strong it was going to hold as soon as Hannibal began to fight it.

"Huh didn't realize I was." Will responded with a slight twitch of his eyebrow, but that was only the facial movement that he made. Not gifting Hannibal with anything to help gauge the man's emotion except for perhaps body language. But even that was hard to read with how he stood, a stance that waved between ridged to convey he was not really in the mood for visitors, but also somewhat calm which could mean he might be willing to open the door for the man if spoken to the right way.

"Understandable your mind is subconsciously using the tactic as a way to form a barrier to protect itself. Creating a distance from something that it once deemed personal, the use of formal titles, now it does not." Hannibal explained with ease, before he waited for Will's response.

“And if it was a conscious choice?” Will countered this time fully rising his eyebrow, waiting for what Hannibal thought of such a blatant attempt to seem bold, to pick at the doctor like he did him, which did not exactly work out because instead of deterring the doctor it just pulled him towards him even more. But Hannibal had to remind himself that it was his craving to pick and push that had Will storming out of his office and away from in the first place. So, he had to remind himself to play somewhat nice until he could discard of the act and go back to their more than mutual interaction with one another. Where both could easily pick each other apart with their own well-made reasons; Hannibal’s being more hidden than Will’s, but each had their own well-constructed reasons.

“The explanation can apply to both reasons.” Hannibal replied, not hiding how pleased he felt not backing down towards Will’s small jab at the idea of being slightly hostile towards him. Will let out a sigh and casted his eyes to the side to look past Hannibal as he thought of his next reply. It gave Hannibal the opportunity to gaze over Will’s shoulder to peek inside his house, to catch a glimpse of what orderly chaos that Will was trying to maintain around him. But everything seemed to be the same as before and he really did not know how he felt about that. Perhaps he wanted something that showed more of an outlash, something leaning more to the chaos side than the organized. Show that the explosion did not only happen in his office, but followed Will home to his little piece of solitude.

“I know you didn’t drive all the way down here simply because you wanted to inform me on what my mind was consciously or subconsciously doing,” Will’s eyes flickered back over to the doctor, “So why are you here?” Though it was spoken like a question, Hannibal knew that Will was demanding an answer and Hannibal felt that urge to draw out his answer just like those times before, to make Will jump through imaginary hoops, and join him in a twisted walk. It was so wickedly tempting, but Hannibal pushed that desire away, though it was tempting and more amusing, Hannibal knew he couldn’t take that route. Not if he wanted to risk an even larger gap that separated the two.

Hannibal took in a subtle deep breath through his nose as he mentally prepared himself for the words he was about to speak. Though he knew that those words were not going to be difficult he still knew he was going to face a blow none the less. “Actually, no that was not the reason for my sudden visit,” Hannibal made a small show of looking over Will’s shoulder with his eyes then back at the agent. “Perhaps this conversation will be best suited in doors.” Hannibal offered as he raised his eyebrows slightly and waited for Will to make a move on whether or not he was going to let the doctor into his house.

Will let out a deep breath as he once more fixated his eyes over Hannibal’s shoulder. A major part of him really did not want to let the man into his house, he came up with the scenario where he would simply tell the man he didn’t really care what he had to say. Bid him a farewell before closing the door where he then would go back to the comfort of his isolation. But for a while that isolation had started to gnaw at some edges of his mind and he could not place where. Maybe he became accustom to always having a presence in his life and now that it was gone, ripped away from him all to quickly not leaving him any room to adjust. This part of him somehow spoke louder than the more original part of himself that wanted to crawl back into place and have him closing the door on Lecter.

Instead of answering, because at the moment Will did not know if he could form an actual sentence that didn't come off with some harsh attitude, he simply nodded his head and stepped aside. He dropped his arm down that blocked off his home to the man and waited for Lecter to take the invite that they both knew he would with some form of pleasure. Which made Will's skin prickle, it had him remembering the time Lecter showed up at his motel door, early in the morning with a container of homemade protein scramble, proclaiming that the day's adventure would just be his and his. A part of him still felt an edge of how easy he buckled to let the man in that morning, but then again where would they have stood if that never had happened? That question crawled into his mind once in a while like a black cat walking out of the shadows of the night and under a street light, flashing its bright green eyes before walking off as though it was never there. As he watched Lecter walk pass him with that micro expression that showed how pleased he actually felt, like a cat who caught the mouse only to let it go, give it a gift of confusion before it went back to the chase, that expression was once more graced the man's face as he was let into Will's home. Hannibal knew that the man once again buckled under him, that black cat once again walked under the street lamp like before.

"I see you are not in company of your loyal companions." Hannibal observed as he took in Will's house and its missing seven members. It was almost odd to see the property without the dogs, it was like walking through a skeleton and stepping into the ribcage, where the heart would be, beating in a constant rhythm that pumped life through the body, now empty, not a sound of the rhythmic beats. The house was missing a key point in it. A point that could easily sway Will's mind into him acting more towards Hannibal's favor.

What else did you expect to find in my home Lecter, maybe empty ice cream cartons scattered around the floor, every generic break up song playing in the background. Sorry to disappoint you, all you have is a skeleton to go off of. No corpse to be seen where you can gather information, no evidence to piece together while you stand in the center. Just bones and nothing else. Will thought as he tried to not let the man's observation under his skin, trying to keep himself at a distance when answering the unspoken question. "Alana took them in for the weekend," Will spoke as he closed the door and turned his attention towards the doctor, before it went past the man as he moved to walk more into his house. Not feeling comfortable talking about the lack of his pack while standing still. It made him feel too exposed, too vulnerable, too on edge. "With her reason being that it would give me incentive to get out of the house for a few days." Will added as he walked past the man, to no real destination in particular. He just found he needed to move, in order to keep himself somewhat in check. Hannibal watched as Will walked past him and he noticed the slight defensive stance he had taken, shoulders slightly raised, body stiff and the way his hands were loosely clenched. He could tell Will was on the verge of making those fist tightly clenched if provoked even further. But as he watched Will walk past him, he noticed that the man was in the mist of gathering supplies around his house, a fishing pole leaning against the wall, a tackle box that though it was not new it still looked well taken care of just like the pole, showing that Will did in fact took great care in his hobby. At the bottom of the staircase was an army green travel duffel bag that had a patch sown on the side that was there to conceal a possible tear in the fabric or perhaps a hole from age.

"And I see you are following Alana's suggestion." Hannibal said as he went back to look at Will, with a look of light interest. Will stopped next to the duffle bag and looked down at it as

he placed his hands on his hips before he shrugged.

“Yeah, she made a fair point, that perhaps I just need to get out for a while.” Will answered though the statement was directed towards the doctor, his focus was still on the duffle bag as he nudged it with his foot. *Go away and leave something buried in the ice, to freeze over time to the point when it does thaw, I will be long gone before it can come back.* He let out a deep breath through his nose. “Be by myself, give myself time to properly think.” Will added, his voice sounded of defeat as he spoke the last sentence and it showed that he was going to take up the idea if Hannibal did not intervene. If Will would go on this little trip of complete isolation where the only company, he would have would be his wounded heart and the fish he sought to catch. Will would certainly come back completely healed, in a way that Hannibal knew he would not like. To prevent that from occurring he needed to step in and interrupt the course of action set by Alana; who once again unintentionally made his own goal with Will quite difficult to succeed in.

“I would not advice you into taking the course of action.” Hannibal spoke and his words easily caught Will’s attention, who turned to look at him with confusion. Hannibal took in a visible breath as he walked over towards the other, hands clasped behind his back, but body movements smooth and persist the opposite to how Will walked when he moved through his house only a few moments prior.

“And why is that?” Will asked with slightly furrowed brows and turn of his head, indicating a cautious curiosity. He was used to the occasional moments where Alana and Lecter butted opinions, it was often like watching two parents fight over what to do with a troubled child and Will was also used to having the label of troubled child branded on him with a hot iron. The brand was the first thing the teachers and other adults saw when he grew up, troubled, and misunderstood. He recalled how he become a pity project for at least one teacher through his childhood. He could never escape the bleeding hearts that took one look at the scrawny kid in hand-me-down clothes that were too big, mop of barely tamed brown curls and permanent sad puppy eyes. His constant story of having to move and being raised by a single parent; who would sometimes come to the parent teacher meetings if worked allowed it, did not help keep them away it only drew them in one after another. Then when the new piece of information that floated through the wave of schools, the information that he also rested somewhere on the spectrum than that tidal wave of pity grew larger and larger. It came to the point Will could no longer fight them off, he realized a while later that if he just allowed them to take pity on him and let them “help” him, they were much easier to deal with. It was when he tried to push them away that they became difficult, they saw his attempt to keep them away was an even bigger cry for help. So, like a lot of things in his life that rubbed him the wrong way and irritated him to his core he learned to just sit there and take it. Will felt like he was in that same spot, but he had to remind himself that he had some say in all this, he wasn’t some child that the adults could ignore.

“Though it is tempting to be alone at the moment and I can see where Doctor Bloom feels that you might want or require some space to help guide you in this healing process,” Hannibal finally came to a stop in front of Will, his hands still held behind his back. “I believe being around others might help clear your mind and not have it cloud over on the possibilities that could have happened.”

“Well, it’s a little too late for that not to happen and besides I tried to be social and it really hasn’t done anything, but give me a headache.” Will said as he moved away from his duffle bag and Lecter, once more with no real destination. The urge to not stand still washed over him, learning from last time when he did stop moving was when Lecter had torn him apart.

“So, you have tried to be social and it failed,” Hannibal mused as he began to follow after Will in a leaser pace. “I’m not at all surprised by that outcome, being forced to partake in something you do not usually do can leave one feeling more agitative then relieved.” Will ran a hand over his face before he rolled his eyes, the man wasn’t even on his property for more than ten minutes and he was already picking at his exposed weak points. Perhaps it wasn’t too late to ask him to leave after all.

“You said you wanted to discuss the reason you are here inside,” Will said as he came to a stop in his kitchen. Leaning against the counter, hands gripping the edge to help keep him anchored, not fully realizing in his attempt to keep moving in order to prevent from getting caught in another one of Lecter’s traps he had ended up putting himself in a corner. Even if he was in his own space, a corner was a corner no matter what the place or angle it held. All while he finally looked at Hannibal, making eye contact with the man for a split second to show he was not in the mood to tip toe or dance around the reason for the doctor’s visit. “Well,” Will made a loose gesture with one of his hands before it fell to his side, “you’re inside. So, mind telling me why you are here?” It wasn’t a well disguised demand, often made to sound like a question that could be left unanswered, no Will was demanding to know and he wasn’t in the mood to play host. He was still recovering from the blow Lecter had given him and he was going to lash out if it kept the doctor at bay from attempting to do so again.

Hannibal stood there, attention piqued at Will’s blatant hostility, it had him smiling internally to know he had left some sort of wound that still had not healed. It was a possibility that he had the chance to give Will the care that Hannibal knew only he could do, all he had to do was put everything into motion and it began right at that moment. The stage was set and the lines were memorized now it was time to start the performance. Hannibal took in a breath through his mouth, he turned his eyes slightly to the side to indicate he was about to admit something he felt regret for as his hands went from around his back and came to clasp in front of him. Hannibal was once again going to preform an act, often not seen from him and he knew it was going to take Will off guard and that’s what he wanted.

“I had come to apologize for what happened back in my office.” Hannibal confessed as he turned his eyes back to Will and he could see it written like poetry on the others face. He had successfully taken Will by surprise when he let those words flow through his mouth and dance elegantly around the stage. A ballerina debuting with movements practiced in the shadows away from prying eyes, an unexpected dance that left others breathless. “The way I had pushed you was a bit too cad for my taste and where you were looking for stability in such a pivotal moment of realizing what emotions lay hidden from you, now surfaced. I had simply pushed when I shouldn’t have and for that I must apologize.”

Will did not know how to respond to the sentences that Hannibal had formed in front of him, of all the possibilities that surfaced in his mind a genuine apology from the pristine man was not one of them. In all honesty Will had forgotten the man could actually make those. “I

thought you said you didn't use apologies." Will managed to get himself to say after coming down from his initial shock. His mind coming back to him and control returning to him as he crossed his arms and waited for a response. Hannibal gave him an amused smile and let out a few breaths that indicated a slight chuckle at the statement.

"If I recall, I informed you that I would use apologies sparingly and I believe this moment should be one of those times." Hannibal tilted his head. "Wouldn't you agree?" He asked as he waited for Will's response, knowing he had once again played into the man's empathy, giving it enough genuine emotion to hide what lied beneath them. What they bared, gave enough away, enough to distract the cautious eye, that way the real agenda; that Hannibal kept out of sight, could slip past the watch dogs as they focused on what was presented to them and infiltrate. Will stood there for a few moments not saying a single word, clear he was weighing his options and how he should respond to Hannibal's words.

"It would seem so." Will breathed out, his body going semi relax as his back rested further on the counter, but he was still much focused on Hannibal. Not truly letting his guard completely down, because when it came to simple like an apology the man was anything, but. Will was pretty sure Hannibal did not believe in simplicity, of course he observed it, saw what it could hold or lacked and that was how far it went. Where there was a blank space that held little, Hannibal would make sure it held more and if he gave any indication that he did find some use of the simple things it was a ruse. Because even if it looked simple, sounded simple, or acted simple there was always something hidden below the surface and Will was certain that Hannibal was going to reveal that at any moment. Pull back the curtains and show something more that he had stashed out of sight as soon as Will showed that he accepted his apology.

Hannibal found amusement on how Will had taken his apology, not exactly accepting it, but acknowledging it for what it was. He really wouldn't have it any other way, because that would show that he was starting to give and Hannibal wasn't ready for Will to fully give. He knew the man better than that, he still held agitation, aggression towards the past situation and what Will held was tempting. Hannibal liked tempting, because it could change at any moment and he wanted a hand in the way it would change. "Glade we could come to an agreement, because I would also like to invite you over for a meal, that way the water can be completely under the bridge."

And there it was the part that made the apology less than simple. Will wasn't all that surprised that the doctor would invite him over for a meal. The man often lead with acts over words, though he did use his silver tongue to persuade others in his favor or entrap them into conversation that they would often try to leave in some way most times because they could not keep up with Hannibal. Other times it would be because they got lost in the way he could form a simple sentence and make it sound as though it belonged in a novel; once again proving his view on simple, it was how he followed his words. With an action that was hard to turn down and he knew that Will would have trouble turning down the offer he made. Will once again blamed it on his southern upbring never turning down a home cooked meal especially if it came from a place of tender emotion like as a thank you or an I'm sorry. If it was a gift for you like a meal or a card you did not turn it down, it would be inhospitable if you did and though Will would come off as blunt, irritable and sometimes if not all the time down right rude. He could never call himself inhospitable, that was the underline reason he had a hard time closing his door on others, they ask to come in for a minute or two and even

if every ounce of him screamed and demanded he shut the door that one small part of him wired into his mind, it always found a way to override all those demands.

“And if I told you that I had plans on getting on the road and attempting on going through with my fishing trip?” Will responded as he crossed his arms and raised an eyebrow.

There it was the challenge; Will was challenging him and Hannibal was taking all of it with a hungry greed. Because he waited for such a small fight to happen, one that would not necessarily hurt either one of them. It wasn’t ment too, it was just a stance to show that though he was putting up with the man that he might come to agree with what Hannibal had to offer. He wasn’t going to give in easily, he was essentially playing hard to get and Hannibal loved this side of Will. The side he hadn’t seen in quite some time and oh how he missed it.

Hannibal took a few steps closer, his shoes echoing off the kitchen floor as he did so with each sharp click that his expensive heels made. “I would have to doubt you on that,” he responded with a slight amused smile, “if you were so eager to take this trip then you would have been far more insistent on having this conversation on the front porch.” He added as he made his way closer, only stopping when he felt he was at the right distance to where there was still room to leave an illusion of space. Preventing Will from forming the idea that he was corned in his own kitchen and thus eliminating the risk of the man lashing out. It was a tight rope balance for him, if Hannibal did not watch his steps ever so precisely then he risked plummeting and he was certain there was no net to catch him if he did, because the net was burned into ash back at the office and it had not been replaced. Though that made the challenge that much more tantalizing to face, a risk it all type of situation was always the more fruitful when completed and everything landed in his favor. Which Hannibal was going to make sure everything landed in his favor.

“You might have a point,” Will tilted his head slightly his eyes narrowing as he began to examine the man’s words. “Are you pointing out what my mind is doing subconsciously again?”

“Simple observation on my part.”

Will made a chuffing sound as he turned his head to hide the smile that played at his lips, licking them slightly to gain composer. “Is anything simple with you doctor?” He asked and Hannibal smiled at the response.

“Now it seems you are also making some clear points as well,” Hannibal also had his own look of consideration, after a brief pause in the conversation Hannibal once again made his offer to see if Will took it. “Is it fair to assume you’ll be taking my offering?”

Will took in a deep breath, letting the offer sink into his mind, there was a part of him that wanted to turn it down to decline the offer of a meal. He wasn’t fully in the mood to be in a casual setting with Hannibal, too many barriers not risen, guards slightly lowered. At least in their sessions he had some ideas what he was walking into, but when it came to times outside that office when it was less restricting that was when things could get complicated and Will wasn’t in the mood for complicated, he just wanted something that was clear cut and Hannibal was like his characteristic paisley ties all over the place but still holding a pattern.

Right now he did need that, he needed structure and fishing had a structure, a constant flow of water and a chance of a catch. But Hannibal had been right he wasn't completely up for fishing at the moment, too much still racked around his mind, being alone with that noise and nothing else deterred him greatly. One could only be left alone with one's thoughts for so long without going mad and Will faced that label already, why risk making it a reality.

If he was honest with himself, Will wasn't completely certain how Hannibal managed to convince him into getting into his Bently and having him drive them back to his house in Baltimore. It was one of the aspects that Will could never quite place, he knew the man could be persuasive, but sometimes it was downright scary how persuasive that man could be at some times. Will stared out the passenger side window he had watched as tall trees gradually morphed into buildings, dirt became sidewalks, and the increase of cars along with people. There went his escape from the noise and population of others, he had to close himself in from the bodies and minds that increased around him. He could not focus too long on what surrounded him or he risked becoming lost in the buzz of their untouched presents. Instead, he took focus on the inside of Hannibal's car.

Will hardly ever shared a ride with the man, they always had their separate cars that got them to either the Academy, the Bruer, or the crime scene. When they did share a ride, it was never their own vehicles always the assigned car or rental, to say this was different was warranted. To be in Hannibal's car was like being in the man's home, Will felt misplaced in some way, the car like the man was pristine as if it was just driven off the lot that day. It still held that new car smell, rich leather and of course that expensive cologne the man always subtly wore, never too opposing enough to play at the senses. If the man was able to describe Will's after shave as "Something with a ship on the bottle." Will would describe Hannibal's as a bottle that would be mistaken for a jar of expensive whisky with an intricate design sketched into the glass with a name only the man could pronounce. It was a mellow scent with a subtle warmth to it that lingered enough in the air. So, it could grab someone's attention, that spoke of wealth, but did not scream it. Yet it could paint a picture of a forest in the fall with vibrant colors and cool nights, but would not be labeled as earthy. Like the bottle it sat in, it too had an intricate design to it that Will did not mind being around.

The soft lull of classical music drifted through the air to eat away at a somewhat comfortable silence. Will's eyes; though he tried to keep his mind out of thoughts, focused on those in opposite cars driving past them and as they entered the large city towards those who took to walking on the side walk. He tried to keep his mind quiet, not pay attention to calculating thoughts or observation. Turning that part him off was like fighting against a tight switch, it was made to always be on no matter what. He could pull at it, try to force it down, now and then it showed a false hope of budging, but it never would. As long as there was not a conversation taking place that held his attention his mind would slip off its leash and begin to wonder around freely. Which it had started to do as Will once more began to watch the outside world pass them by as they drove through the city and as they came to a stop light he noticed a family walking down the sidewalk. A mother, a father and two kids, a boy and girl both different ages. The little girl bundled in too many layers to help protect her from the winter probably no older than six, head covered in a thick white hat with a puff ball to top it off and a scarf that matched wrapped around the lower part of her face. She held onto her dad's hand as he held her back from wondering off, the father had a fond smile on his face as he kept pace with his little girl. Then Will's eyes wondered over to the mother, who held a

small boy in her arms, he guessed the boy must have been three, his head which also had a thick dark blue hat, rested on his mother's shoulders eyes closed. The mother's smile showed how she took in the sight of her husband and daughter, it too was a look of fondness, a look of warmth as the hand that rested on her son's back began to gently move up to the boy's head and began to stroke at the hair that peaked out under the hat. The couple walked down the side walk and as Will watched them a thought skittered a crossed his mind and took the spot light for him to focus on. It had something to do with a remark the Lecter had made the other day back in the office and for some clouded reason Will felt a need to clear the air.

"She was never the mothering type." Will spoke in a hushed voice as he continued to look out the window. The sudden voice of a very silent Will, caught Hannibal by surprise for numerus reasons, one being the introduction of such a sensitive subject matter. He did not exactly expect Will to start opening up about Rhettford, but he wasn't going to let the opportunity pass him by as he contained his facial muscles to keep as neutral as possible. As he focused on the road, the traffic light turning green and he began to move forward.

"Care to elaborate Will, I'm not sure what you mean?" Hannibal lied as he took quick subtle glances towards the man in his passenger seat. Who still had his focus on the outside world, his calm almost dull expression not giving away how he was feeling, but also at the same time it did. Giving Hannibal the impression it might be alright if he continued down this path. Perhaps that was the key to everything instead of pushing Will or prying his jaws open it only took patience and the man would soon come to him completely. Similar to how Will collected members of his pack, with patience and understanding.

"Miranda, you asked if I had thoughts about a white picket fence and the sound of small footsteps." Will took in a deep breath and slowly let it out, hot breath fogging the window, but at the same time clearing the fog that lingered in his mind. "The answer is, I had at some point dreamt of a future like that with her." Hannibal's grip on the steering wheel tightened until his knuckles turned white as did his jaw. Teeth baring down on each other until he felt a slight ache set in that threated to grow if he continued. The idea that Will once dreamt of such a ridiculous fantasy with that woman, it sent a cold heat burning inside of chest that slowly began to grow, covering each of his rib bones and teasing at attacking his heart.

You poor foolish man, once again have fallen victim to the naivete of your own heart. Letting it fool you into believing in such an obscure fantasy. A fantasy that I could easily dissect even with the dullest blade, take out the cancerous tumors that grow inside its heavenly façade. Then would you no longer be blinded by all that glitters, would you finally stop listening to that weak part of your mind that still wished to succumb to it or must I burry my arms deep into its opened body, staining myself with its pestilent promises pulling piece after piece out of it until you can finally listen to the only voice that holds value. Mine. Hannibal thought as he fought the urge to remove his focus from the road and turn it fully onto Will.

"I had stopped when I realized that she would never want that. Miranda could be warm towards me and others she liked, but she wouldn't have that warmth with a child or the patience." Will explained as he lowered his head slightly.

"Do you think if not for the current circumstance with Miss. Rhettford if you two had a much more conventional relationship," Hannibal managed to get himself to speak, his throat

wanting to close around each word he produced as though he was stopping himself from vomiting. Will had to suppress his desire to dry chuckle at the words Hannibal used to convey a normal relationship, where Miranda wasn't a murderer and using him to stay hidden from the FBI. "That perhaps the topic would have come up with your desire to have a family and her not wanting that leading to the two of you separating?" Hannibal continued as he once again glanced over at Will with a slight hope that Will's answer would be yes, because in any world where Will was attached to anyone else in any way that was not him, it had that tar boiling to life deep inside his chest.

Will took in the question and turned it around in his mind, examining it with every angle he could before he could give an answer. "Perhaps there would have been an argument that would have taken place between us, maybe there would have been a chance of separation." Will answered and before taking in a small breath, his face twisted slightly with uncertainty about his thoughts of a family if that life was really his wanting or just another normalized aspect of life pushed onto him like everything else that society labeled as normal from day one. "I am still not certain I am looking for a family of my own. I am still content with my pack after all."

Though the sentence was full of doubt and speculation with a nice sprinkle of self-negativity, which helped tame the idea of that never to be touched possibility that Will and Miranda might have had a stable relationship together in another life. Hannibal took in the answer as a whole and swallowed it with some ease. "Feeling content though often viewed with a negative light and judged by others, it is still a suitable feeling to have." Hannibal said as he continued to give Will a few quick glances, he could tell the subject had ended there, that there really wasn't anymore to be said and Hannibal could not help, but feel a bit pleased that Will had given him something to help chase off some of the starvations that the man still felt.

Nothing more was shared between the two in the car ride, it stayed in that comfortable silence as they continued the drive to Hannibal's house. Will did not speak more about his past relationship and Hannibal did not push him to, learning from the little sustenance he was given. That if Will wanted to, he would share and Will was content with what he said. It was an odd feeling almost as if a piece of jagged glass was removed from a part of him, that dull pain that it caused was slowly beginning to die down. Leaving behind something that felt for an odd reason better than what was there and it nearly irked Will to think that perhaps opening up and talking to Lecter about Miranda had some healing aspect to it. But he wasn't about to let the doctor know how he was starting to feel better, he wasn't in the mood to see that subtle smug smile that liked to grace the man's face.

Not when he was starting to be in a better mood than he had felt that morning. Waking up to an empty house with only his thoughts and the evidence of his dogs being there, but not. It had him rethinking taking Alana's offer to watch them for the three day's he had off so he could go get lost in something he enjoyed. But when he thought back to it he knew the reason he had taken her up on the offer was because like Hannibal, Alana could be very persuasive in a much more warm hearted way. Where her pushy behavior came from a place of wellbeing made it easy to think about her offer, it also made it easy at times to turn her down. Easy to make the argument against what he wanted versus what she wanted and when Will stood his ground at just the right-angle Alana tended to take a slight step back, like himself,

she too suffered a sensitive guilt complex. But that day she came with the advice to go away for a while Will did not find it in himself to fight back the advice, only to go along with it. With that idea, then perhaps if he showed he was willing to take her advice then she and nearly everyone else would step back and let him handle his own feelings and mind.

"What I have planned for our meal are veal hearts stuffed with mushroom and spinach served with roasted delicata squash that will be drizzled with a cranberry agrodolce." Hannibal spoke as he walked up his steps and picked out his house key, while Will stood on the steps below, his eyes scanned the surroundings, watching as a car or two drove by.

"Feeding me the part that is broken in order to make it whole again are we doctor?" Will said with a little bit of flat snarkiness that held some amusement and made it palatable for the doctor. Giving away that the more prickled Will was returning to him, that he was once again showing signs of opening up and letting down some of the guards that were keeping Hannibal at bay.

Hannibal hid his amusement at the jab as he focused on picking out his house key. "Though the case could be made against me, the thought never crossed my mind," Hannibal lied as he unlocked his door and stepped inside with Will following him. "In actuality my butcher had received a rather nice supply and I simply could not pass the opportunity." Hannibal continued to lie as he slid off his coat and hung it then watched as Will copied his movements. The hearts in reality came from two actors; and giving them the label actor was being generous on Hannibal's part. Because he did not see the two as anything other than stains on the stage they infected with their presence. They had the misfortune to play a part in one of the cannibal's plays that he enjoyed viewing from time to time. One of the actors could barely remember his lines, often getting lost, butchering his lines when they did grace that poor excuse of a brain. The other man was a simple eye sore when it came to his performance, unlike his partner on the stage, he knew his lines it was the deliverance and the behavior that soured the experience for Hannibal. The man would miss his que numerous times, along with where he was and wasn't supposed to stand, his costume was unkept barely assembled, nothing was straight or kept, and then when he would act it was clear he really did not want to be there. Well Hannibal figured it would only make sense that neither of their hearts were in the art of their performance, he thought the best place for them would be on his dinner table. "Have you ever dined on an animal's heart before Will?" Hannibal asked as he began to walk towards his kitchen after Will had hung up his coat. Making sure the man would have to follow him in order to answer the question properly.

"Can't say I'd have," Will answered as he followed the doctor into his kitchen stopping by the island as Hannibal went around. "I've handled them when I make my dog's their food, but actually cooking one and eating one myself I never faced the temptation." He answered as he watched as Hannible walked over to his fridged and pulled out a glass baking dish with two deep red hearts tied with butcher's twin resting in a nest of cut mixed vegetables, from what he could see were carrots, onions, and celery. Along with a yellowish clear liquid Will assumed was a type of broth that would slowly bath the meat while it roasted in the oven. It also showed how confident Hannibal with himself and his ability to persuade Will into coming over, preparing the two hearts a head of time before even getting an answer from him. It made Will wondered how far Hannibal would have gone if he had turned him down. How far his persuasion could have stretched and how long he could have held out.

Hannibal felt himself slightly perk up at the thought that Will had never actually consumed a heart before and he would be given the opportunity to be the man to serve him one. “After tonight you will no longer be able to claim such a thing.” Hannibal said as he set down the baking dish its glass making a light thud against the counter top. “And I am glad to be the one to give you your first experience.” He said with a subtle pleased smile as he turned to look at Will, but instead of giving the man a chance to respond to such a bold statement Hannibal continued to move around the kitchen, making it clear that the conversation topic had ended there, not giving Will any time to process, unless he risked getting lost on the next subject that came from Hannibal.

It did not take Will long to process the sentence, he was quite quick to understand what small pleasure Hannibal felt with the idea of being able to present him with something new. A dish he had prepared with his own hands, his own odd form of care placed into it. The man did have an ego and for a second Will could have sworn he had seen those peacock feathers ruffle out to catch the evening sun, before hiding away. It had Will wonder how many times that night would he catch those feathers again, would it be on purpose or accidental, Will could not tell, yet a part of his was curious on the outcome. The other part wonder if he could survive a night like that, tapped in a house with Hannibal and his ever-growing ego while he accidently fed it. Perhaps it wasn’t too late to call it quits, call a cab and give a half ass apology that he sort of ment, but not really. Will knew the doctor would understand to some extent, but then their next session would be even rougher than their previous. If that one was like standing in a raging storm with no shelter to protect them from the cracking lighting and cutting winds that turned heavy rain into small knives, the one following if Will made the decision to abandoned the dinner, it would be a hell fire. Nothing, but burning flames that melted away armor made to protect him. Blistered his skin and exposed the nerves, all while he burned alive under Hannibal’s maroon gaze that matched those licking flames.

“That’s odd.” Hannibal suddenly spoke, his words were enough to back Will out of his spiraling trance and bring him back to the presence as he looked over at the man, who stood in front of his sink.

“What’s that?” Will asked as he broke from his internal spiral and focused on the other, as Hannibal’s back faced him. But Will still could tell the man was puzzled at whatever sight laid in front of him.

Hannibal made a slight movement of looking over his shoulder, giving Will a quick glance before turning his attention back to the sink in front of him. “It seems I find myself having an issue with my sink once more.” Will looked over at Hannibal with slight confusion, before walking away from the island and over towards the sink.

“What do you mean?” He asked as he stood next to Hannibal, who gave him a slight glance as he hid the small amount satisfaction with able to draw Will’s curiosity towards him. Before hiding it away quickly before it could be noticed. Going back to that slight confused state he had conjured up a few seconds ago.

“The water.” Hannibal answered as he leaned over and swiped his wrist over the sensor and barely a trinkle came out. “Which I find odd because I never had trouble before.” He continued adding the right amount of confusion in his voice as he stared down at the sink, on

hand resting on his chin while his arm wrapped around his torso. “What do you believe the issue could be causing this?” He asked as he raised an eyebrow and turned slightly towards Will, who looked at the sink with slight perplexion, his body stance mirroring Hannibal’s.

“I can’t say for sure, let me take a look.” Will said as he put his focus on the issue in front of him. A few reasons running through his mind as he walked towards the sink, before lowering himself down and crawling under the cabinet without saying another word. “It seems like everything is fine under here, no leaks, nothing loose.” Will called out from inside the cabinet as he laid on his back to grant himself a better look of under the sink, while Hannibal watched relieved, he did not have to hide the pleased smile he was holding back. As he walked closer to Will, his footsteps once again silent as he entered Will’s space without his knowledge.

“Then what do you believe could be the issue?” He asked as he slowly squatted down beside Will’s bent legs; even though the man’s eyes were not one him, Hannibal made a show of showing interest and intrigue by peering under the cabinet as well, but staying out of the other’s sight. His eyes roamed around the small space, before landed on Will’s chest. Where he watched as it rose and fell in silent, he could picture the expansion of his lungs and rise of his ribcage, before it deflated. The urge to reach out and rest his hand on Will’s chest began to rise inside of his mind, to feel his heartbeat under his palm, the heat from his body reaching out and seeping into Hannibal’s own body. All while he continued to breath at a steady pace, it also had Hannibal imaging what it would feel like to feel that breath quicken while his heartbeat began to race. All while he added a small amount of pressure onto the profiler’s chest, holding him in place while he leaned over Will. Gazing into wide eyes with either constricted or dilated pupils, while his own were unmoving. All while he pressed onto Will’s chest, the only thing keeping Hannibal’s hand away from accessing the heart would be skin, muscles, and bone. But that did not stop Hannibal’s dark imagination from forming the image of his hand being able to pass through all three obstacles, where he could hold the delicate muscle that gifted the body life and could also take it. To feel that part of Will resting in his palm, vulnerable to his touch, knowing that he could either care for it and let it continue beating or end everything in an instant. The idea of slowly feeling that rhythmic beat begin to slow down, the muscle dying as it gave up the last of the energy that it had. What a sight, a sensation that would be to watch, to feel. The image itself had Hannibal’s eyes closing as he pictured it all taken shape in his mind, the warmth he would feel, the power. It all swirled behind his eyes like dripping colors of a fresh painting that still had not yet been born. If the man’s brain captivated him to no end, then his heart held second place. The idea of the lion’s heart that laid caged in the body of a lamb destined to be sacrificed, it sent a wave of electric pleasure down his spine and a dash of euphoria through his brain.

“I’m not quite sure can’t really put my finger on it,” Will answered as he slid himself from under the sink, “but I have to ask.” Will cut himself off as he sat up and was greeted by Hannibal being quite close to him. Once again, the man proved how capable he was at moving silently and unnoticed, entering his space as though he was allowed to without Will’s say in the matter. The man simply looked at him waiting for Will to continue his sentence, as if he wasn’t invading his personal space, eyes unmoving as they rested on Will’s face. Though Hannibal seem to be waiting for Will to finish his sentence he had started, the man was having a hard to in finding his words as he felt something stir deep inside his chest. It was that odd flicker again, that played at the back off his mind as it kept escaping him before

he could fully understand it. Teasing him with an idea of what it could be before it was quickly vanish leaving him confused on two parts. One, wanting to know more about it and the two, how he missed the small heat it made inside of him. This all had him shifting slightly as he tried to collect his thoughts and focus on the task at hand and not how causally close the doctor was to him.

"Ask me what Will?" Hannibal asked as he slightly tilted his head, Hannibal could read Will quite easily while he sat close to him. The way he was taken back nearly startled by his own close proximity, how it left his mind suddenly blank for a few seconds. Those golden cogs freezing for a slight second before starting again and there it was again that slight trickle of pleasure Hannibal felt knowing he was the one to cause that interruption and no one else.

Will swallowed the lump in his throat and slightly shook his head to regain focus. "If uh if you were or anyone really were maybe tinkering with the pipes by any chance." Will instantly hated how that sentence basically fumbled out his mouth like a new born fawn. Legs weak, not used to holding weight or knowing what to do with it, while its body adjusted to the gravity that surrounded it for the first time. Hannibal's eyes finally left Will as he made it seem like he was taking in Will's question, recalling anything that would answer it.

"Actually yes," Hannibal answer as he turned his attention back Will, "After you had installed my new faucet the repair man I had contacted before you called me back. I told him that his services were no longer needed and the reason behind that. He then offered to come down and inspect your work with no charge, to make up for not being able to help when I needed his assistance." Hannibal explained as he watched Will slightly nod, clear he was believing the once again well-constructed lie he was being hand fed.

"And what exactly did he do?"

"A simple examination I presume, making sure the pipes were connected right and everything was running smooth. I tried to explain to him that you were more than capable of installing a new faucet, but I could tell he was not believing my words." Hannibal went on to explain, making sure each word he spoke came out as casual as possible. Enough to make Will's mind wonder off and focus on the present, where he was and how he could help.

"He examined the pipes?" Will asked as he looked back towards the underside of the sink and there it was, what Hannibal wanted, for Will to take the bait and he just did. Hannibal felt a small smirk race across his face, but quickly caught it as Will turned back to face him. "I might have an idea on what is causing your sudden water issues." Hannibal tilted his head slightly, intrigued by Will's statement as he grew curious to what Will had come up with while being fed false information. "My question is do have any tools on hand?" Will asked as he looked back over at Hannibal and this time Hannibal did not hide his smirk.

"You had mentioned you had an idea for what is causing my sink to act the way it is." Hannibal spoke as he leaned against the island, across from Will. Who once again had the upper half of his body underneath Hannibal's sink. The doctor watched as Will twisted his body slightly, Hannibal enjoyed the sight of watching the fabric of Will's flannel tighten around his side. As the fabric gave slight hint of the body underneath it, the skin pulling tight over muscles, the only time Hannibal's eyes ever left Will was to check on the dish that was slowly cooking in the over. The light scent of roasting meat mixed with the hearty tang of

mushroom that copied a similar smell with the spinach, those two scents were battling for dominance with the softer sweeter scent of the mixed vegetables as the aroma floated around the kitchen. Two senses being stimulated for the cannibal.

“And I do.” Will grunted as he twisted his body in the other direction gaining Hannibal’s attention. “But tell me this,” Will’s body went back it to its original position, “if you had these tools with you,” his arm came out of the cabinet and in his hand held a wrench, “why did I have to stop by my house to grab my toolbox the first time you asked me to fix your sink?” He asked before his hand went back to under the sink. “Could have saved me a trip,” Out came his hand once more, “and the gas to be honest.” He mumbled as he set the wrench down and grabbed a pair of needle nose pliers that sat by his side, before he retracked his hand.

“Did it ever occur to you, that I went and bought these tools after my first sink fiasco?” Hannibal asked with a slight picking tone in his voice that he knew would strike something in Will.

“Fair point.”

“Or perhaps I had already owned these tools and you simply assumed that I did not.” Hannibal added because he felt like that one remark needed a partner to help dig slightly into Will’s side. Which seemed to have done the trick because soon Will had slid himself out from under the sink and sat fully up, forearms resting on his knees as he gave Hannibal a light glare.

“You know it’s not really nice to provoke a guy who is fixing your sink for the second time.” Will warned as he gestured towards the slightly smug doctor with his pliers.

Hannibal could not stop the soft look of disbelief that crossed his face as a smile also entered the equation. “Are you threating the wellness of my sink?” He asked as he crossed his arms and tilted his head slightly while he took in this long almost forgotten side of Will, the hardly ever seen a rare gift only preserved for those the profile saw fit and the idea Will was opening himself slightly more to him to give him that gift, Will was being playful. The pleasure that came from that thought one would have thought he was called to examine one of his own crime scenes, where he would watch as many agents tried to decipher his message sculpted out of the flesh that belonged to the pigs that infected the same species he belonged too, only to fall miserably flat. To only be lifted slightly when Will would walk onto the macabre masterpiece and be able to see the deeper meaning and not only see it, but understand not only the meaning behind the art, but the true being that laid behind his mask.

Will gave a nonchalant shrug. “All I’m saying is, there is always the possibility that I could accidently mess something up while I am under there.” Will said as he turned slightly to look over his shoulder towards the sink then back towards Hannibal with a toying grin that said that he would go through with the act if pushed and that side of him made something in Hannibal stir only slightly, to see a more mischievous side of the profiler, like the playful side it made Hannibal hunger for more. As more pieces that made up the puzzle that was Will Graham came into his hand.

Hannibal let out a small chuckle, lowered his head slightly and shook it. “I will admit defeat while I still have a functioning sink.” He said as he raised his head to look at Will and was greeted by a pleased smile that filled the man’s face, a smile hardly seen by another being. Perhaps it would often grace the members of his pack, and the walls of his home. But it questioned if that smile was ever shown in the presence of another being, Hannibal believed the answer would be no. “But you did say you had an idea on the issue is that correct?”

“Oh right, yeah I found the problem.” Will quickly said as he shifted back into his previous mindset of solving Hannibal’s sink issue. “This was lodged in your water supply pipe.” Will revealed a small piece of rusted metal that was the size and shape of a marble, it also had a few dints hammered into it. It resembled something that one would find on the side of the road or on someone’s garage floor and not causing havoc in a well-polished kitchen where the cheapest object was still over forty dollars. “Son of a bitch was a pain to get free,” Will leaned forward and dropped the piece of metal into Hannibal’s out stretched hand. “But there is no doubt that little guy is what caused your sudden water issue.”

Hannibal studied the piece of metal as though he was seeing it for the first time. “And how would this inconspicuous piece of debris cause such an effect on my sink?” Hannibal asked as he looked over at Will. Who set down his tool and rubbed both his hands over his knees as he came up with a way to explain the situation.

“My guess and this is just speculation. I believe the guy you had over put that into your water supply pipe when he was under your sink. It is the right size to move back and forth when the water comes in until it gets caught in one of the ends when you turned the water on high.” Will explained, as he looked up at Hannibal, who had expression that told him to keep going. “Then it’s get caught like it did and you’d find yourself in the situation where you’d have to call the repair man up to fix the issue.”

“In other words, you just saved me from being potentially swindled.” Hannibal said with a breath of annoyance as he set the piece of metal on the island counter top.

“In other words.” Will said, he really couldn’t help, but feel a little bit bad for the man. Here he had trusted the repair man when given an offer out of the supposable kindness of this stranger’s heart and it nearly came around and bit him. Hannibal on the other hand was pleased to see that his plan had come into fruition, though there was a small part of him that did not enjoy the fact that he had once again had to risk the structure of his kitchen for the second time. That part though was muzzled at the greater idea that it would have Will once again putting most if not all his breath-taking mind on the issue that revolved not only around the doctor’s kitchen, but the doctor himself. Bringing him back in the center of that chaotic beauty once more, removing Miranda from the spot light, so he could take the rightful spot and this time he was going to be damn sure to keep it on him. “But if you ever need advice or someone to check on something you have my number.” Will added in hopes to ease the doctor’s mind, but instead of easing it, it was more like stroking it. Giving it another dose of unintentional pleasure, that had the man internally preen at the offer of having Will at his beck and call whenever he felt in a dire need of a handy man.

“Thank you for the offer and once more for coming to my aid.” Hannibal responded with an appreciated smile as he bowed his head slightly, “But let’s hope the offer is hardly ever

needed." *At least until I find myself craving you're presence and a simple session or dinner invitation will not end the harsh pull I find myself plagued with since the moment I laid eyes on you.* "Though this does bring up the question, how did you know that the repair man had tried to pull the wool over my eyes?"

"Oh, one of my dad's friends and I say that lightly, he never really had many of those, he's a very secluded man."

"So, there are some traits you share with your father." Hannibal said with intrigue, while Will sent him a warning glare. The threat to cause chaos to the man's sink was still on the table and Hannibal easily caught the slight shift in Will's behavior. How his eyes darkened and facial features tighten, clear he had walked into a section of Will's life that held some edges that not only cut those who brought it up, but also damaged the man himself. Making Hannibal's intrigue grow even more and the hunger ache.

"Anyways," Will went on, clear he was going to walk around that statement as though he was walking around a rotting corpse that was only half way through the decaying process. Where the flesh still hung on to the bones, but showed signs of slipping off, skin turning into a pestering yellow. The eyes clouded and slowly dissolving back into the skull, the smell coming from it would be enough to make the strongest stomach threaten to turn if someone stepped close to it. Making the rotting carcass the perfect feast for the bugs he wrote a book about. "One of my dad's friend's, was a plumber besides bull shitting with my dad on the dock about the luxury houses he was paid to fix, which were basically any house with an upstairs or a backyard that could fit a child's swing set. He also liked to gloat about how he was able weasel a few extra bucks out of them." Will let out a breath though his nose as a look of distaste crossed his features. "He believed if they had the cash to live in those types of houses and pay some random man to fix a clogged drain, then what was stopping him from taking a few more payments. Not like they would care as long as they didn't have to get their hands dirty." Will answered, clear that was going to be the only amount he was going to give Hannibal about the subject. Going into too much detail about his dad's only friend would be going into choppy waters, because what Will wasn't going to let slip past his lips was what happened to that man.

Some would think that all his swindling finally caught up to him and in some form it did, but not how most would think. He wasn't confronted, by an angry costumer, nor was he arrested or fined, instead he ended up trying to pull the same stunt on Will's dad. Will could still picture the two outside that night on the dock they often shared a beer on. His dad's muffled yells as he beat the living day lights out of the man, Will did not know how he felt as he watched his dad beat up a man that not even two days earlier they took fishing with. But Will found himself unable to look away as his dad landed hit after hit, knuckles colliding with a bloody broken face, as the other hand held the staggering man in place, not letting him get away, like the slimy leech his dad labeled him as, all while yelling about how dare he tried to pull the same stunt on him, before throwing the man in the lake by the collar of his torn shirt.

The anger in his dad's eyes as he stormed inside burned brighter than the lite end of one of his cigarettes, his busted lip twisted into a snarl with blood running into his bead, the blood on his knucks that Will knew did not belong to him, dripped onto the wooden floor. The animal that entered Will's young mind when he watched his dad walk in was that of a mad dog. Shackles raised, eyes scanning for the next thing to pounce onto and teeth ready to bite.

Those were the dogs Will would encounter on his way home from school, chained to a post in neglected backyard, barking and snarling at anything that passed by rotting fence. Guarding nothing with their lives, for an owner that often forgot to feed them. That was what his dad seemed like at the moment as he walked inside with a heaving chest and a blistering anger that invaded Will's mind like a toxic cloud of smoke so pungent that it had him feeling nauseated. Will did not leave his spot by the window, frozen like a deer caught in the head lights as he watched his dad walk over to the fridge; that barely worked and need to be replaced, while he mumbled in creole French, in order to keep his son, from fully understanding the hell fire filled words that spilled through his gritted teeth, but Will understood. His dad yanked the fridge door open so hard Will was surprised it did not come off, a part of him hoped it did just so they could replace it. But it didn't and his dad reached in pulled out another gas station bought beer from it, before walking over to his chair and that was where he stayed for the rest of the night. In his worn-out recliner, one hand gripping the beer can tight, the other drumming his fingers on the chairs arm, while he tapped his foot so hard that dried mud began to come off of it and mix with the blood that belonged to his friend turned back stabber and his own. All while not saying a single word to his eleven-year-old son, who obviously knew what just happened outside and Will did not find it in him to ask, because he knew better then to talk to him, not while that head spinning stomach twisting anger still poured off of him like the cheap booze he drank to extinguish that burning anger.

It wasn't until the morning did Will no longer feel that anger come off his dad and the man acted like nothing had happened the previous night, he simply went on with his day with a busted lip, bruised knuckles and one less friend. Will had never seen his dad act that way before that night, he had seen him get angry, kick the occasional busted engine out of frustration or mumble a curse under his breath as his hands clinched and unclenched. But that level of anger, where he exploded into an act heated violence, that had never been witness before by Will and sometimes it still haunted him, knowing that anger lingered underneath a man, who always showed little emotions. It made him wonder if that same fire lingered in him and was just waiting for the right moment to be released, but if he made it this far in life without an incident then perhaps, he didn't have that much in common with his old man like Hannibal commented about.

"The hearts should be ready in ten minutes." Hannibal informed as he finished taking the hearts tempter, before he began to work on cranberry agrodolce, setting up the pan then uncorking the wine to let it breath before pouring it over the cranberries. All while Will worked on putting his sink back together, the two had begun to work in comfortable silence before Hannibal had decided it would be best to break it. "And I must thank you once again for not only fixing my sink for the second time, but for uncovering a plot against myself as well."

"It was no problem, I'm just glad it happened while I was here." Will answered as he finished his work in putting Hannibal's sink back together. "Do you mind turning on the faucet, I believe I have everything in place." Will responded and without replying Hannibal walked over to the faucet and activated it. "Shit!" Will grunted as his body began to twist and this act quickly took Hannibal by surprise as he quickly stepped backwards to see what had caused the younger man to react the way he had. Only to see water spraying out from under the sink for only a few seconds, before it stopped and Will came out from under the sink. "That was a surprise." Will said through painting breaths.

“Are you alright?” Hannibal asked as he took a step forward, choosing not to mention the fact the Will was currently soaking wet, dark curls dripping with water and the top half of his shirt soaked causing it to cling to his body.

Will took in a few more deep breaths, letting his body calm down after a brief act of panic. “Yeah, guess I just didn’t tighten the pipe enough and the thing came loose and started to thrash around like a pissed off snake.” He answered with a brief chuckle and a shake of his head at the ridiculousness of what just happened.

“I can see that.” Hannibal said with his own amused look and a slight chuckle as he reached over for a dish towel and handed it to Will, who nodded a thanks before wiping his face and arms off. “Though I am thankful that it is a simple issue of not tightening of a pipe and not something worse.” Hannibal said as he watched as Will attempted to dry himself off, that was when a risky thought sauntered into his mind. The idea nearly had his diminishing it the moment it came, it was far too risky to attempt, but then again, this whole day was built on risk. Seeing if his plan would play as they would the whole day, laying out a winding path for Will to follow making sure that there were only subtle familiarities, to make sure he stayed on the trail, but enough turns to keep his mind occupied and second guessing. In order keep those thoughts of abandoning what Hannibal had laid out for him and taking on a new path where he was in charge all away from him. The day had been going in his favor, he was even given a few gifts along the way, what was one more risk, the worst part if it failed would be only a slight step back which wouldn’t cost much since they had already made it so far down the winding path together. Leaving enough room for error that Hannibal knew he could easily take control over if it were to happen. “Your shirt is soaked if you would like I can toss it in the dryer.” Hannibal smoothly offered.

“It’s fine really,” Will said as he went to dry his hair with the towel. “I’m used to having a soaked shirt.” He lowered the towel and looked up at Hannibal. “But thanks anyways.”

“I must insist, it was my sink that caused this to happen and if I must add I do not feel comfortable if a guest of mine sat through one of my meals with wet clothes.” Hannibal responded making sure to mix in a hint of guilt and slight discomfort that would be toying with Will’s need to please in order to make the situation go more smoothly for those around him rather than focus on his own comfort. Hannibal deduced it was due to growing up with a more dominate parental figure, like his father, the constant moving without being able to voice his own thoughts about it, never in control and when he would be able to speak, he was often responded with a harsh outlash that no doubt had the young Will cowering back and retreating into his mind. Learning quickly to simply go along with his father’s wishes unless he risked another outlash, all that while also being given a near stand offish relationship where the man perhaps seemed more like a provider of basic needs than an actual father. Proving that when it came to Will himself, he would always put himself last if it ment that others could strive in the greater picture of things and leave him be. Obeying the loudest or the most demanding voice in the room, trying to stay hidden in plain sight when the spot light was forced upon him. While Hannibal himself basked in the light made it his domain with ever deceitful performance, Will burned in it with every open-heart performance he was forced to put on.

All this revealed a weakness that Hannibal was not at all hesitant to exploit, it did not drive anything inside of him to feel guilt, it only brought a dark twisted pleasure that dripped down his spine and spread through his body in a warmth that could be compared to the fall sun. Not as abrasive as its summer self, but it still could radiate a heat that could make one wonder if the jacket was worth wearing that day. Will though, he would bite at the hand that probed him, little nips here and there he would also show remorse for those actions, quickly backing down and turning his gaze, a trait Hannibal would be more than willing to train him out of doing, to never show remorse when lashing out at those deserving. There was also a behavior in Will that showed he would more than prefer an approach that was polished compared to the jagged way he was used to being lead around, now it was the time to use that approach. "It would only be the rightful act to do after all."

"And what exactly am I to wear if my shirt is in the dryer?" Will asked, clear it was a rhetorical question. Not in need or want of an answer, he did not expect one if he was honest, relying the Hannibal would take the tone of his voice and drop the subject. Let bygones be bygones. Though the man was insistent, the obvious way Will's voice sounded and slight body language. It should have told the man that his was ridiculous that he was more than fine with dealing with a wet shirt. But when he watched *that* smile form on the older man's features, Will realized he had just been cornered by the cat.

God damn it Graham, all you had to was say no, it's that simple, you can say that word in how many languages! Will thought as he adjusted on of the sleeves to his newly required smokey grey sweater. That felt to his surprise remarkably soft, it almost made him curious to check the tag to see what it was mad out of. Because looking at it, he wouldn't have guessed it would feel nice on his skin, he expected it to be at least itchy then that would have given him an excuse to not have to wear the sweater. But sadly, Lecter like always had the taste for high quality and the sweater though simple was high quality. *It's just a loan, nothing more. Don't think about how this is his sweater that he is letting you wear. That will defiantly make this awkward.* Will kept telling himself as he adjusted the sweater on himself, trying to feel comfortable while also trying not to feel comfortable at the same time. Because if he felt comfortable that ment more of his barriers were beginning to lower themselves and he already let Hannibal in one too many times as it was. *Just get through dinner thank him for the sweater and when it is all done go home, throw your gear in the back of your car and leave. What I need is isolation just like any other sickness, it needs to be contained and let the body handle it, outside forces will just muddy the process.* Will thought as he closed his eyes and took in a deep breath through his nose in a poor attempt to calm him now confused and racing nerves. But as he did, he caught another dose of Hannibal's cologne, that warm scent that made something in him flicker and those nerves sparked for a fading second, as if they were toying with Will. Making him question himself even more than before. *This is insane; I can't do this just tell the man thanks for the hospitality and leave.* Will kept thinking to himself as his mind attacked itself, trying to understand why part of it was lashing out while the other half seemed to prefer how the day was going. *No, I can't do that either, I came this far the meal is probably already set on polished silverware awaiting my arrival to enjoy the delicate craftsmanship that was put into. If you can get through a case where you have to force yourself into the mind of a killer all while Jack is demanding more from you, you can get through a simple dinner while wearing one of Lecter's sweaters.* Will thought one last time as he made his way towards the kitchen

“I uh want to say thanks for lending me a change of clothes.” Will manage to say, the words felt forced, as he stepped into the doorway of the kitchen still fiddling with the sweater. Pulling at the bottom hem, then the sleeve, though he really did not to adjust so much after he had left the bathroom. He did not even bother to look in the mirror after he put it one. He knew that would only cause his flight instincts to kick in even more.

“It was no issue on my part, once again it was my sink that caused the unfortunate situation to occur.” Hannibal responded as he focused on plating the meal making sure the slices of meat laid perfectly on the plate adjusting them so they aligned in the proper position, before he added the side dish that would help bring color to the plate. Hannibal only stopped to look at Will, to help solidify his response, to only be trapped by the vision of the man in the doorway. The sweater was a little bit large on him, not by much perhaps in the shoulders and chest, the arms were slightly longer than what Will was used to. Causing him to keep rolling them up as the slipped past his wrist to stop at the joint of his thumb where it connected with his palm. But thanks to the high quality of the material, it fitted to the man’s physique with ease.

Seeing Will wearing an article of his clothing it made that possessive beast that paced around with its heavy chain lash out. Pull against its leash snapping its jaw and slashing at the air with its pointed claws. The beast’s tail whipping around, cutting the air as a low growl grew in its heaving chest, how it wanted to pounce and pin the other man down under its weight. Hold him still as it leered down on top him, its heavy body pinning him place, slowly moving down until they were inches apart, lips pulled back so pointed blood-stained teeth were all Will could see as its body vibrated with a slow building growl. Until it could consume and possess him, that action alone would satisfy its uncontrolled desire for years to come. Hannibal held back on the possessive beast’s chain, though it was extremely difficult to do so, the chain slipped several times in his hand as he let the reality set in.

That, Will Graham was currently wearing one of his sweaters, the deity that Hannibal questioned numerus amount of times throughout the months where Will was in the arms of another had once again blessed him for his patience, it was enough to make him somewhat believe in this divine creator that had tortured him for some time. He had planned for the sink issue; he predicted that Will would be more than willing to lend a hand in order to fix the problem Hannibal had created in secret. What he did not foresee happening was the sudden mishap with the water pip drenching the other man the way it had. Then Will’s slight acceptance to bend for Hannibal to allow the man to spare him a new shirt to wear while his tumbled in the dryer. Here he had planned the evening to be more of a treat for Will, a nice meal, a project that involved him using a set of skills that did not revolve around his mind, and perhaps end this night with the two of them in his parlor enjoying one another’s company, both with their choice of beverage that would help loosen the tongue and lower the last remaining barriers that Will still held in place. But now Hannibal had the pleasure of that along with the view of Will draped in something of his. It had his own chest stirring with a pleasure that licked at ever nerve in his body.

“Though I must admit, I did not expect you to give me something quite so causal?” Will said with a slight chuckle as he once again adjusted the sleeves. Not sure if he should roll them up so they rested on his forearm or just keep fighting them. If he did the second option then he would have something to fiddle with during the rest of the evening. “I often forget you have

other outfits besides three-piece suits.” Will confessed as he looked up at the doctor. Who had moved away from plating his food to pouring them a glass of Pinot Noir.

“Though it is hard to believe, I do know how to dress for casual affairs.” Hannibal replied as he walked over to Will and handed him on of the two wine glasses, making sure to keep the air like Will’s outfit casual yet still sophisticated. It also gave a reason to invade Will’s person, where he could gather both Will’s scent, but also his own merging together as one. It kept that feeling of pleasure flowing through him. He had chosen that sweater, because it was one of the less formal ones, he owned that one he knew the profiler would feel somewhat comfortable in and two would pair well with Will himself. It would bring out the blue of his eyes along with the natural highlights in his skin, like his lips and how in the right setting they often resembled the peddles of a bleeding heart. Not too red, near a soft pink that drew the eye with ease even when words did not slip through them.

“I’ll believe that when I see you in a pair of blue jeans.” Will said as he took a sip of his wine and eyed Hannibal, who held a look of soft amusement. Glade that Will still showed his more playful side and did not retreat.

“I believe that day will only grace us when Jack is able to apprehend the Chesapeake Ripper.” Hannibal responded as he took his own slow sip of his wine.

“I’ll hold you to that.” Will said gesturing lightly with his glass. “Hell, I’ll even take you shopping for a pair.” He added with a one shoulder nonchalant shrug before he took another sip of his wine. Clear he was becoming more relaxed in his surroundings once more as smirk graced his lips as he looked over at Hannibal waiting for his response.

“I suppose that is only fair,” Hannibal lifted his glass once more, “if the day ever arrives.” He assed speaking more into his glass, but enough for Will to hear the skepticism in his polished voice. That had caused Will’s own intrigue to finally arrive and it also caused a small amount of amusement.

“So, you don’t believe Jack will ever be able to catch the Ripper?” Will asked as he crossed his arms and raised an eyebrow. Clear he wanted to hear Hannibal’s untainted view on the man’s ability to track down the elusive killer that only came out when the state that he called his hunting ground was lulled into a condition of blinded bliss. That was when he often pounced, crawled out of his blood-soaked cave and went on the prowl, before disappearing. Never to be heard of, not until his blood lust demanded more of him and he found himself submitting to his cravings. Because Will knew that the Ripper was an addict to that craving, he needed a strong fix to help keep himself at ease as time went on in order to blend into the rest of society, to come off as the rest of the pigs that surrounded him during his time in the days light. But at night in his own domain would he be free to shed the person suit he wore and let his true self breath with unrestricted lungs and stretch unbound limbs.

“As long as you stay on Jack’s team, I believe he will have a finer way of navigating more of the Ripper and what lies behind his killings.” Hannibal answered and that answer alone had that subtle smirk on Will’s lips grow into more of a smile. Showing the amusement, he felt towards Hannibal’s light jab towards the head agent.

“In other words, if Jack wants the slightest chance of catching the illusive killer, he better keep me around?” Will asked raising an eyebrow. Hannibal didn’t answer clear that was as far as his silver tongue was going to talk about the man and his ability to hunt down the killer that had been plaguing his mind since he slain his first victim. “You do realize that if Jack heard you say such a thing he’d never let me back in the class room, right?” Still not a word from Hannibal, instead the man began to walk away from him and over to the two plates where he began to plate the roasted delicata squash, the burnt yellow blended with the roasted heart. The only bright color on the plate came from the cranberry sauce that Hannibal drizzled over the plate with the movement of a skilled painter. “But then again if he does then it would only mean more sessions, more talk of death, more questioning my own sanity.” Though the sentence had started off light and a bit teasing it quickly turned dark as reality slowly set in for Will, because weren’t those the reasons for his and Hannibal’s sessions in the first place to make sure there weren’t any more cracks in Jack’s prized tea cup or if there was then Hannibal was there to make sure they did not spread.

“I believe this talk of sanity and the Ripper should take a momentary pause.” Hannibal finally spoke up after he caught the faraway look in Will’s eyes as he paused his action of taking another sip of his wine. That was when he knew he should step in, in order to keep Will’s mind in the present and not wandering into the dark forest of his thoughts. Will quickly refocused himself once he heard Hannibal speak, his eyes readjusting and he resumed taking a small drink of his wine, not noticing how tight his grip had become on the delicate stim on the wine glass.

“I believe that is a wise choice.” Will responded, the dry wine with its sweet taste of cherry and vanilla kept his throat from completely closing in on him. But it did not chase away the slight crack in his voice that was evidence of the fact it wanted to close itself off. As his body and mind threaten to separate as one went motionless and the other drifted to some place dark and damp. Where it could fester and grow like the mushrooms that laid beneath the more buoyant raspberry in the rich wine. But all that flavor that haunted his tastebuds began to turn to a harsh copper the more the wine lingered in his mouth, making him grimace slightly when he had to swallow it.

Where it now turned to vinegar in his stomach, it had Will wondering if he could actually get through this dinner after all. He took in a deep breath once again being greeted by Hannibal’s cologne and it once again made his nerves scream out, so did the fabric of the sweater. It was too nice, it was too comfortable, it was too much. Everything started to feel too much for him, crashing onto him like an avalanche, thickly packed snow chilling to the bone crushing down on him. With no end in sight as he attempted to claw his way out, but for only his fingers to turn numb the more they dug into the never-ending sea of white. The cold struck his bones and scratched at his skin while the pressure increased on his chest, making it difficult to breath as the cold continued to seep deeper and deeper into his body. Just like his mind continued to sink deeper and deeper into the dark abyss that waited for him with open arms. Because what waited in the dark was the truth about himself and Will still did not know if he could face the reality of what creature lied in his sanity. A creature that fed on darkness that was drawn to, a darkness that his current job kept feeding it, so it could never starve.

“Will, Will.”

The profiler took in sharp breath, his eyes blinked in rapid succession as he once more came fumbling out of his head. “Sorry, you were saying something.” Will said as he turned his head to look over at Hannibal, who had one eyebrow raised as he studied the other. Clear he had an idea what had just taken place behind those skittering eyes that danced around him and not on him.

“I was simply informing you that I had finished plating and it was time to move our conversation to the dining room.” Hannibal informed, the look of intrigue never leaving his face as he continued to study Will, he could feel Hannibal trying to predict his next move. But Will honestly did not know his next course of action as he felt himself slowly starting to tear in two. One part of him wanted to stay and make an attempt to get through the dinner, while the other wanted to get out and go back into isolation. “Even though we both agreed to leave the conversation topic behind, it still seems to haunt you.” Hannibal pointed out. “Should we go into further detail why that is?”

“Would it be wise to venture into unsteady terrain, don’t know what might lie in the dark.”

“Perhaps it would be best to venture together during a time when a light might luminate a path for us to take.” Hannibal said as he picked up the plates and began to walk towards the dining room, knowing that Will would follow him and though Will felt some hesitation to follow. He took one more deep breath before walking after Hannibal.

The two sat in Hannibal’s dining room across one another, the only sound was the soft music that filtered in and the occasional hard sound of silverware hitting ceramic. Though the meal looked appetizing like always, Hannibal once more proving himself with ease on how he could decorate a plate turning a meal into a work of art even with some of the simplest ingredients at times. It had Will wondering what the man would create with the most basic food ingredients. Nothing that would be delivered from a foreign country or picked up at one of those high-end supermarkets where it often felt you needed to follow a dress code to get in. That would be a sight to watch, seeing the man pounder what to do with chicken breasts, russet potatoes, and carrots, baby carrots. The scenario that began to form in Will’s mind, imagining Hannibal staring down at such basic ingredients, recipe after recipe running through his mind, but none applying to what he was given. The look of frustration with a hint of panic that would graze those sharp features that often held a look of superiority when no one would notice and a look of fake softness when eyes were on him. Now that would be a meal Will would enjoy to sit down to, knowing the hell the man must have been through trying to create something simple when all that lingered in him wanted to go for abstract.

“Is something amusing you Will?” Hannibal asked as he raised an eyebrow wondering what else roamed in the empaths mind. Will blinked a few more times as he soon realized that there was a slight smile on his face. For a split-second Will could feel himself become slightly embarrassed, by the fact he had gotten lost in his head with such a ridiculous fantasy that began to form in his mind, but his logical side of his mind quickly dismissed the childish idea. There really wasn’t anything to be embarrassed about.

“It’s nothing just simply getting lost in my thoughts again.” He answered giving Hannibal a quick look before turning back down towards his plate. *If you weren’t embarrassed Graham, why did you answer that question like a child who got caught daydreaming in class!* Will

chastised himself and he felt his lip twitching slightly wanting to form into a grimace. But he found enough control to not let that happen.

“The more expected response to that would be me admitting relief, that I had hoped it had nothing to do with the meal,” Hannibal began before he took a bite of the heart, placing it delicately in his mouth before pulling it out. His teeth grazing over the fork. He chewed the peace of meat for a few moments letting the atmosphere build forcing Will to wonder what might be said next. “But as we both know you have not yet touched your meal. Is that because you are still lost in thought?”

“It’s hard to navigate myself back into the present when the path is hard to follow.” Will answered as he picked up the fork which felt heavy in his hand. Still uncertain if he could go through with the act of actually eating the meal or not.

“Then perhaps we should talk about what is keeping you in your mind, but it would be rude of you not to at least try the heart.” Hannibal said as he looked down at the untouched plate. Most of the time he would feel a jab of irritation if anyone else sat at his table and almost refused to dine on of his meals. But once again he found himself making exceptions for Will, the exceptions were slowly beginning to pile up for the younger man and it also made Hannibal wonder how high he would allow the mountain to grow before he acted upon it. *You should count yourself lucky once more Will, for anyone else I would have not stood for such behavior at my table. You should also be lucky I don’t set down my utensils walk over there and force the food down your throat. Force you to intake such a crafted meal I spent time and energy to make for you and you alone. I know your mind is acting against me at the moment in ways you simply do not understand quiet yet. Keeping you complacent like a statue, wanting to hold your attention with its own tricks and persuasions. But I’ll have you know that though I had created this night so all attention will be on you, I also made it so your attention is on me.*

“Oh, right sorry.” Will weakly apologized as he stabbed a piece of the heart and placed it in his mouth. He could not lie he had expected the flavor to be more akin to liver, he expected it to taste more like copper with an odd sweetness lying behind the metallic. Instead, what he experienced was similar to any cut of meat, a rich and savory taste that coated his palette, with a slight buttery aspect to it thanks to the young nature of animal and how Hannibal properly roasted it. Not rushing the meal or cooking it far too long in the oven to where the meat would toughen over time. The tang from some of the metallic aspects wanted to linger on his tongue, but it was too weak to do so making it far easier to enjoy the richness that came from red meat. There still was a tang that came from the mushrooms and the spinach it helped chase away the savory taste of the meat. But Will found he began to enjoy the warmth and sweetness that came from the sudden introduction of nutmeg that lingered behind the more prominent flavors.

Good boy. Hannibal watched with interest as Will took his first bite, watched as his jaw slowly chewed as his mind processed what his body had just been given for the first time. Hunted and prepared just for him, the feeling of rapture flooded through the cannibal in large dosage as he continued to watch Will chew then swallow. Though there was a twisted part of him that laid amongst the rest of his twisted self that wanted to force the man to consume his meal. To strap those arms and legs to the chair. Watch him struggle like a desperate animal,

Hannibal wondered what profanity would come from those clinched teeth or maybe nothing at all. He would simply glare at him with fire filled eyes, starving Hannibal of a proper interaction, punishing the man with the only way he possible could. But that would not stope Hannibal, as he would grab a hold of that jaw and open it, to feel it fight against his grip, fighting to stay close while Hannibal fought to wrench it open. A power struggle turned losing battle as Hannibal no doubt would come out on top, when he opened that mouth and place the first cut of heart in Will's mouth. He would then make the man chew it, instead of letting him follow the instinct to spit it out, by forcing that jaw to open and close making the man appreciate the meal Hannibal put together. Then would come the act of swallowing the heart, all that would take would be to cut off Will's air supply which would not be that hard. He had done it several times in his life and though there would be another fight for dominance the man would have no other choice, but to give in. And then to Hannibal's delight the process would start all over again until the plate would be completely empty, maybe if he felt especially sadistic, he would make Will another plate so the experience would have to continue.

"It's delicious." Will finally spoke after swallowing the cut of meat as he looked over at Hannibal, drawing the man out of his own fantasy.

"I'm glad you enjoy it; most people hesitate when it comes to dining on heart." Hannibal said as he took another bite.

"Understandable, most would feel a sort of discomfort knowing they are eating that part of an animal with such symbolism behind it, along with the idea that it used to give it life." Will took another bite before he continued. "With any other cut, say for example loin there is no association, no guilt." Will said as he looked down at his plate to try the squash, missing the pleased look Hannibal was giving him.

"I would not have put it any other way and I am also glad I was able to gift you such an experience for the first time." Hannibal said as he took sip of his wine once again fluttering those peacock feathers of his as he did so. "In Aztec culture they would offer the sun god Huitzilopochtli a human heart; still beating after being cut and removed from its vessel, in order to aid it in its fight against darkness. They believed if they feed it these hearts it would give the god strength to keep the sun moving and make sure that the world did not fall into eternal darkness." Hannibal said as he took another bite, he then looked at the fork as he chewed then towards Will. "Keeping away the end of the world."

"And now we feed on hearts that were simply butchered for sustenance. To fill the stomach and chase away hunger until we are in need for more." Will responded as he took another bite of his own meat. "Far from nourishing a sun god in hopes to keep away the end of the world."

Hannibal smiled in amusement as he cut himself another piece, finding the flat humor Will had offered him in such a truthful statement. "You have a far point," Hannibal set down his fork and knife as he turned his full attention to Will. "But I would like us to turn the topic and focus on something else." Will knitted his eyebrows together. "I believe it would be best to not leave the issue of you becoming lost in your mind unaddressed."

Will set down his own utensils before he leaned back in his chair, he could feel the heat from the fire place slowly tracing his back like the sharp point of a pencil, as he crossed his arms. “I thought you wanted to leave the talk about the Ripper and my sanity back in the kitchen. Come back to it at another time.” Will pointed out as he could feel the grow of agitation begin to rise in his chest.

“That is true, that is why I believe it will be a good idea to talk about the lighter side of the topic.”

Will could not help, but let out a scoff and roll his eyes. “And what exactly is the lighter side of a sadistic sociopathic killer, who comes out of the dark, only to disappear without a trace months at a time and the fact that I could or could not be insane because I can play dress up in his clothes when Jack orders me too?” Will asked with an underline of sarcasm as he leaned forward slightly with an eyebrow raised, clear sign of his aggression towards the claim. Which had Hannibal turning his gaze downward as he suppressed the smile that wanted to form at such a light nip, he was given.

“I was hoping we could discuss more on the work load and how it is effecting your profession.” Hannibal spoke and he was gifted the sight of Will leaning back once more clearly taken back by the answer as it blindsided him. His eyes slightly wide and a look of soft surprise. His expression no longer hard and defensive.

“Uh sure, we can talk about that.” Will said as he gathered himself, he had not expected for the doctor to want to take about his actual job and not the dress up act he did. Will was prepared for the other two topics they were always the most discussed when it came to him, it almost seemed like no one could actually have a conversation with him unless it ended up trinkled down to the subject of either his mind or what his mind was capable of. Never speaking of anything other than that, sure Alana would ask him how he was doing and he would reveal certain aspects of himself. Like how his dogs were, or how small projects were coming along, but he could tell she was only asking with a psychiatrist’s mind, it was the way she looked at him and took in his words. Of course she took in his words listened to him as if they were friends which they were, but Will knew what really rested in her mind. She wanted to know how he was mentally holding up while being in the field. Will studied Hannibal for a moment, as he tried to see if he could catch that same look in his eyes, but he could not find it. “What exactly do you want to talk about?” Will asked as he slowly sat back up, placing his hands on the table.

Hannibal made a small show of thinking over the question. “I was simply curious; you have to juggle both your profession as a professor and an agent at Uncle Jack’s beck and call. I know I often find it difficult if not a little irritating when the man expects me to drop what I am doing to help consult with a case.” Hannibal said with a small smile on his face as if the two had shared a joke and this caused Will to mirror the facial expression as well.

“I guess we both sit in the same boat when it comes to dealing with Jack and his quest for justice,” Will said as he reached over and took a sip of his wine, where he discovered that it no longer tasted like blood when it washed over his tongue, but instead held those soft notes of vanilla mixing lightly with the dark of cherries. “Though I will argue that my side has a

few more holes." This response had Hannibal's small smile grow as he let out a light sound that most would associate as a laugh when made by the polished man.

"Well then I'd gladly help patch those leaks when they arise to the surface." Hannibal said with a warm smile, Will found himself returning that same smile. Where he felt a hush of warmth spread over his face and that odd flicker stir in his chest as he did so. It had Will once again pondering the odd feeling that once and a while greeted his body, grazing over his ribcage as if someone held a match over each of his bones and pulling away quickly before anything could burn. It still made little sense to him. But then again, half the emotions he did feel often made little to no sense to him nowadays. Will shook the feeling away as he went back to the meal, he had enough issues wondering around. his mind at the moment the last he needed was trying to decode a feeling that had been haunting him for months.

"I know people find it hard to believe, but I don't actually enjoy it when he interrupts my class." Will confessed as he leaned against the corner of the counter while he watched as Hannibal washed the dishes used for that night's meal. White dressed shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows and hands buried deep in warm soapy water. "It's my job, my actual job to help make the next batch of profilers that are going to be put out in the field," Will took a small sip of his after-dinner coffee, though it was caffeinated Will could feel an odd calming comfort in the rich bitter drink, that held a soft nutty taste that helped smooth out the bitterness that the sugar could not touch. "I mean not only do I feel like I am failing them when I can't do my job properly, I'm also failing myself."

"Understandable you put so much hard work into, achieving your goal at becoming a professor for the academy, that it often feels as though that work is simply looked over, ignored to some degree by others. Along with the idea all that knowledge you attained while working toward that goal is left sitting on shelf collecting dust." Hannibal looked over at Will and gestured with his eyes for Will to hand him the next plate so he did not have to take his hands out of the water.

"Left forgotten while other more important things pile around it obscuring it from view." Will handed Hannibal the plate. "Most would assume I would be glad, no thankful to be in the field, since I failed to become a "real" agent." Will took another sip. "Tell that to the degrees I have under my name, the work I put in, or the dream I had to set aside and the world I had to readjust to." Will said as he looked down at his coffee, staring at the small reflection of himself. "All those late nights studying until the crack of dawn while trying to get by on savings and part time jobs either bartending or late night piano playing for places that thought they were more superior than any other bar just because they sold liquor that cost over fifty dollars to drink." Will continued still not looking up from his cup, not noticing how Hannibal slowed his washing and watched the other intrigued to watch Will once again opening up for the second time since they left his farmhouse.

"I understand how you feel, being accepted into John Hopkins was no easy task for me as well and if it wasn't for the art I can create with a fine pencil I often wonder if I would have been able to attend in the first place. It certainly helped with expenses at the time." Hannibal confessed as he waited for Will's response, which was a slight twitch of his lips his solum face slowly breaking away.

“I doubt my paintings could have pathed the road like your drawing had for you.” Will said with a slight chuckle as he looked up at Hannibal.

“I did not know you painted.” Hannibal said as he removed his hands from the sink and began to dry his hands. Will nodded his head as he took another sip from his coffee, Hannibal picked up on the behavior rather quickly. Every time Will was about to reveal something about himself, something that most did not know about him, something that was not surface level the younger man would take a sip. It was almost as if he was pushing himself to talk, the coffee would break down a transition point and push his tongue and vocal cords to create the words that would reveal those small aspects about himself. If Hannibal had to wait for the man to finish his coffee in order to be given even the smallest amount of information, then he would. He would even brew another batch just so Will could have something that would keep him talking.

“Uh yeah, not as much as I use to,” Will said as he rubbed the back of his neck, “it’s nothing grand, simple landscapes, now and then I’ll throw in an animal.” Will said with a slight shrug as he lowered his hand and slid it into his pocket. “I did it at first because it helped me deal with the over active imagination I have. It was an output and kept my mind focused, then I noticed it helped with my shoulder after my accident. Good physical therapy at home.” Will explained, not realizing how he was rotating his right shoulder subconsciously as the scar tissue tightened up due to the old memory.

“Even the simplest of landscapes are still a work of art.” Hannibal spoke out trying to diminished the negativity Will held towards his art. “Would it be over stepping if I asked to see some of those works one of these days?”

Will shook his head. “Not really, you’ve been in my house,” Will took another sip, “you’ve probably seen them and not realized it.” Hannibal’s eyes lit up for a second as he came to the realization that all those small landscape paintings that could be spotted around Will’s house were not done by some unknown artist, who sold their work at a farmer’s markets or crafts fairs. Where Will stumbled upon them and felt akin to buying just to stick someplace on his walls in order to take up space and distract his mind from the cluttering mess of dead flesh and haunting stairs that tended to pile over time. But now realizing those paintings were made by the man himself, every paint stroke that held a pent-up emotion, ever combination of light and dark colors that came together to create an image that passed though those searching eyes, to then be deconstructed in that beautiful mind and finally reconstructed on a piece of canvas.

Another intrusive thought skittered across Hannibal’s mind. He wondered if perhaps Will might notice if one of those paintings suddenly disappeared, now that he knew most if not all of the paintings that could be found in that farmhouse could have been made by the man. He wondered if Will would miss just one, not a large one, something small easily looked over. It wouldn’t be too hard for him to venture to Will’s home while he was away, possible on a case or lecturing, greet the dogs remind them he is of no threat to them, and then simply take one. Perhaps on that belonged in one of those spare rooms upstairs. Where when opened you are hit with cold stale air, where time seemed to have stopped for a few seconds only to come alive when disturbed.

“But I can’t hold it against you if you hadn’t realized it,” Will spoke drawing Hannibal once again out of his thoughts and back to the present. Where he watched as Will set down his coffee cup, the delicate crystal singing out as it hit the hard counter, before his crossed his arms. “It’s just another part of me that no one believes actually exists. They only see the part that they want and the rest is obscured by the blinders they willfully leave on.”

“And what do those eyes see when they look at you Will?” Hannibal asked as he tilted his head, his voice warm and soft. Lulling the man to answer such a heavy question that would either confirm or deny how Will viewed himself when he looked through the eyes of those that found themselves willfully trapped in his social circle. A cage Hannibal himself felt no need to break out of, in fact he cherished the idea to find himself in such a golden cage, where he knew that the door did not hold a lock, that he was more than welcomed to walk out of any time he wanted to. That Will was not forcing him to stay in, it was contrary Will would not mind if the man left, he would have blamed it on his own actions if Hannibal did decide to leave. But Hannibal wanted to stay within the shiny bars of his encloser, where his actions could be the reason those who also found themselves in the same cage left. Leaving only himself, the way it should be.

“Jack sees me as a tool to use when things become too difficult, but now it feels like that use is drastically shortening. Alana sees me as a skittish dog, weary of every hand that reaches out to give affection, that is being threatened to be put down the first chance they show aggression. A project that constantly needs her help or else things will fall apart and she will feel an immense amount of guilt when it happens.” Will took a deep breath through his nose and casted his head to look away from the doctor. “Miranda seen me as a means to an end, away to hind under the eyes of the FBI while she basked in the blood she shed.” Will then looked down at his shoes his eyes dim and face sobber. “Once again proving my point, people only see one part of myself and not the whole being that is there. Just someone to use or look at, never truly knowing what lies underneath the claims that surround my name.” There was a short pause before Will let a chuff of a laugh as he turned his head up towards the ceiling, a weak sardonic smile spreading in bursts over his face, his muscles twitching with each small stretch. It was a fight on rather he should smile or not at that point, if he could keep the emotion or just let it all fall. “At least she was original and not using me for my mind like everyone on else has been, drawn to another part of me that likes to play second fiddle.” That was what Will found pathetically amusing about the whole situation when he looked back at it. That Miranda sought out something different from him, not his empathy; the focal point for everything about him to the point where it made Will wounder what he would be like if he did not have the ability. Could he had actually become an FBI agent instead of playing pretend, could he have actually managed to handle firing his gun, could he have ever been seen before.

Once again Will felt himself slowly drowning in his own thoughts, as it slowly pulled him down. Into the dark depths of self-loathing and self-hatred, where the only creature that swam in the dark waters was his own thoughts. That could not wait to turn on him the moment blood entered the water and the dark water had turned a deep shade of red and his breath was quickly running out. The problem though Will had begun to feel like he had no real need to fight to keep himself from drowning any longer, let the cold water of his mind claim him and never let him go. Set him a drift once more, shut off every part of him that still held an ounce of life. Let it slip through his fingers like running sand, watch it gather below him and simply

exist in the world that surrounded him. It would be best after all, Jack would get his tool and Alana would have her dog, a win, win for the both of them. While Will felt himself drowning, Hannibal continued to study the man and it only took a split second for him to realize what was happening in front of him.

You will not disappear in front of me my dear boy. Hannibal thought as he tossed the towel aside and began to walk over towards Will, who had shown signs of becoming lost in his own mind once again. *Not while I have you right where I want you, not when I had set this whole day to play into the parts of you that needed to be taken care of. That would have you opening up once more like a chipped clam and inside the blackest of pearls.*

"Though I too have fallen into the same pattern of Jack and Alana," Hannibal spoke as he continued to approach Will. "First seeing the brilliance of your mind and being drawn to it like a moth to a flame and I do not hold any guilt for that action." His tone of voice slowly began to shift as he grew closer and closer to the other man, it softened and dimmed, as if he was whispering a confession to be judged and reprimanded. But the confession held no guilt in it, for Hannibal felt no guilt or any negative emotions with the words he let flow through his lips. "If I had then I would have stopped myself from approaching that flame, I would have missed what there was hidden it its glow. Because I soon began to see past that one aspect, past what others seen, the more that I unraveled front you over out time together the more I grew interested."

Will blinked a few times clear Hannibal's voice had broken through the man's no doubt spiraling train of thoughts and he slowly lowered his head so instead of looking at the ceiling he was watching Hannibal. Who now stood in front of him, close enough that Will could feel the strong heat radiating off the man and Hannibal noticed the look in Will's eyes. It spoke of a prediction of what he had to say, that would end up lashing back at Will and Hannibal knew the predication was false and he could not wait to prove it. "I grew interested in all of you, not a small part that you have no choice but to bare the damaging weight of each day, that lets you see the world at every angle there is, through perspectives untouchable to anyone else. You possess a flame inside of you that burns a dark rich light that catches the eye of every curious mind that wants to know more about only that flame. It draws them in to a distance where they can feel its tempting heat, but they dare not move any closer for fear of the burn that will happen if they over step. Yet I found myself walking past those individuals, towards the radiating heat, without fear of the burns and once I moved past that dark light, I found myself gazing on the whole person who produced the flicker of light. Which only made myself more drawn to you then what others are able to see, because the more you reveal to me about yourself, the more I felt enrapture with what you were giving me the opportunity to view." Hannibal watched as Will unraveled his arms around his chest and they slowly lowered to his side while he took in Hannibal words, letting the man know he had all of Will paying attention to him and not just some part of his mind. He had to keep going. "With each breath you spoke those words of secrecy, to those slight movements that seem to marvel the way the wind carries shadows through tall grass. You paint a scene that belongs to a great portrait that you rarely let others view, yet you have let myself view some those pieces over time, you have let me put them together and what you paint I find myself yearning for more."

Hannible stood in front of Will, part of his heart revealed in his hand. Dripping and beating for the man to take and study with intrigued eyes. Eyes and mind that will take those words

and dissect them like a body on the slab, peeling letter after letter back until he reached the core. Where he would find the meaning behind the confession and continue to examine it, holding it in his own hands. Holding a part of Hannibal's heart in his palm, watching it beat without its other half that still rested, hidden in some dark corner of Hannibal's chest. Where it could never see the light, because it required the shadows to flourish properly and there would be a day where the man would let that part of him be seen by the empath, but at the moment all that needed to be seen, the part he had shown to Will.

Who stood there, eyes slightly wide as he stared at the doctor, lips slightly parted and mind in a slow crawl. The words that trickled in his mind caressed parts of his brain that were only a few moments were a buzzing bee hive of self-doubt, that threatened to drown him, but thanks to Hannibal's low velvet tone and deep words. Will felt that part of his mind become soothed and put at ease, the buzz had died down and the grip that was dragging him down had slowly released over time, he could finally take in a deep breath. But for some odd reason Will did not feel the need to take in that deep breath as he found himself consumed by Hannibal's words, the man's confession towards him. A confession Will did not know if he fully deserved to hear. Those words did not belong to someone like him from a man such as Hannibal, they painted him in a picture that should be hung in a church, of a holy figure dawned in roses with the light of God shining upon him. Where people would stand under with hands pressed together, heads bowed and words of prayer being whispered through religious lips. A seen Will knew he did not belong in, yet the man made him feel as if he did. It made his heartbeat quicken slightly while something stirred in his chest and his blood began to run hot inside his veins. Suddenly something in him began to crack open, chip apart from his being, letting something peak out beneath those cracks.

Before Hannibal or Will could say another word, back track slightly and try to resume to their previous behavior. Will took a step forward and Hannibal watched with intrigued eyes, as the once standoffish man in front of him closed the gap between them. Within a split-second, without second guessing his actions, Will took control of the situation with almost a wild leap of an action, no real thoughts of what ifs to cloud his mind and hesitate his next form of actions. He just acted on this sudden urge; this need that filled his entire being that he knew deep down was not out of the blue. Will stepped forward and connected his lips to Hannibal's. Will had closed his eyes when his lips met the others, he could hear the doctor take in a sharp breath through his nose and his body stiffened for a second. Before relaxing rather quickly. Hannibal's lips, Will liked to fool himself believing they would have been rough, but no he knew they would feel soft against his. Soft, but not delicate, not plush, they held a firmness in them as they met Will's. Gretting his sudden action with something that would slowly ease him down and hold him. Which Hannibal began to do, his arms slowly came up and took Will's arms in his hands, he pulled the other man close to him. Their chests pressing hard against each other and Will's own hands came up to grasp Hannibal's forearms, reaching out for stability in this sudden kiss. Confirming that this was real and Hannibal had held him into the kiss and not trying to find a way to push him back.

Will had expected for his back to either hit the counter or Hannibal stepping away. Breaking the moment entirely. Where then Will would either see a look of anger from the invasion or one of sadness laced pity, because the man had misread the signals being sent his way. Neither of those negative outcomes came in fruition though instead Hannibal had pulled him closer, had held on to his arms with a grip that was surprisingly tight. To the point it was not

fully painful, but it could go either way all it would take would be a small amount of pressure, a pressure Will could slowly feel growing inside of his chest. The same chest the rested against Hannibal's as they continued to hold one another. Neither of them moving in any direction, they stood in the kitchen with hands gripping arms, and lips resting against lips.

Soon Will had broken the kiss, the same one he had quickly acted on, he had slowly broke. Pulling back slightly and took in a deep breath from his nose. If he already wasn't being covered by Hannibal's scent, smelling it every now and then, he definitely was now. Being that close to the man, having his hands still grasping his upper arms, which Will felt squeeze, fingers digging into flesh when he pulled back. As if they wanted to keep him in place and not let him take a step back like he had. The man's scent now ingulfed him further, washing over his mind and body like his presences. The warmth that flowed over him, caused Will to ache. In a need to not pull away like he had, to keep this closeness that had happened. But he found himself pushing that ache aside when he opened his eyes after he had straightened himself. He looked at Hannibal with wide eyes and slightly panting breath and Hannibal looked back at him with only a slight look of surprise and something that hid underneath it. Something that had been there the whole time and wanted to break through the barriers that kept it contained. Will had seen it for a split second as it flickered through those sharp maroon eyes, before disappearing, it had him quickly breaking eye contact. It also made it so the whole situation came crashing down on him and he realized what had just happened.

Holy Shit.

Chapter End Notes

Yep another cliff hanger muhahahaha! Anyways don't know if the water line trick is real it was something I made up for the fanfiction. So don't take it to heart, I just needed to think of something that a sleaze ball would do to cause the water to stop and for Will to fix.
Also yes I had Will wear the same sweater that Hannibal wore in the sessions final, why? Because it felt right. :3

To Cleanse The Palate

Chapter Summary

The time has come when to beings ment to merge together finally have the chance to do so. No longer with any barriers to hold them back, no words or actions keeping either behind the cage bars that they had found themselves trapped behind. Both finally aware of what was always ment to be. The masks are left behind and now all they have are themselves to face and become something that waited in the wings.

Chapter Notes

Holy shit, again I am full of apologies for this long of a wait time. I hope this will be wroth the wait as it is the last chapter of this long drawn out fic that has been in total 467 pages long. What started out as supposably four chapter maybe twelve chapter at the most has grown into this twenty chapter beast. I've never written anything this massive in my life. Took my around two years in the making and just wow, I honestly did not see it coming when I sought out to write this, not sure what I'll do with myself now that its finally over, I did discovered the SpaceDog fandom while writing this and the whole HEU as well so who knows what lies a head. I already have a few fics forming in my head.

I want to thank everyone for joining me on this little writing journey and sticking around though such long update periods and all the miss spellings and what not. I can't describe how grateful I am you all gave me the time for this fic of mine it means the world to me. So for the last time, you see all those mature tags up there, yep its time to put them into actions.
I want to say thank you for the kind comments, and kudos and once again enjoy :)
Ps... Fun facts will be added at the end notes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There was a sentence that was often written when things in motion suddenly stopped. When worlds that revolved around individuals all synced together and came to focus on only one thing. Drawing eyes and thoughts to one pinpoint of attention, where the bubble that kept everyone in their one little plane of existence. Where the crowd of chattering individuals all came together as one mind and everything stopped. The sentence that would describe a way to paint the atmosphere after everything came to a halt would be, the silence was deafening. That was how Will would describe the moment he found himself cemented in place in, not a sound echoed through the pristine kitchen and Will found his ears straining to pick up a single sound. Any sound even the small pops that would come from the soap suds as they

dissolved, or the sound of a distant clock counting the seconds, even though time itself seemed to have started to come to a crawl. Slowly moving forwards like cold molasses, stretching down out of its glass jar, not breaking during its descent. Not until it hit sold mass and it still would not break, only seeping outwards as it piled onto itself and was not granted the structure to hold its own weight.

Weight, there was an odd feeling of both a crushing amount pressing on Will's chest and a feather like lightness creeping over his shoulders and towards the base of his neck. A tingle of wild electricity brushed through Will's scalp and down his neck causing the hairs of the back of his neck and arms to rise. His arms. Will could still feel Hannibal's strong grip latching into his flesh; only being pillowed by the sweater's sleeves, as he stood staring at the man. Who he had just half hazardously kissed not even seconds ago. His grip was the only thing keeping Will from taking off right then and there, bolting out the front door. Where would he go? Will did not entirely know; he just knew he could have his dogs packed and situated within the span of an hour and a half, thanks to years of experience with picking up his life and moving it. Sure, there would be questions and the endless amount of phone calls that would no doubt follow. Some worried, others angry and for a split-second Will wondered if it would be worth it. To slip away like the morning mist, let the wind carry him far away and disappear without a trace left behind of him, except for a stain that would fade away over time until he became a distant memory. Some would look back at for a fleeting moment in time and quickly turn away when there was nothing there to keep their minds on him. How they viewed him never truly mattered, if they looked back at him fondly or with distain, it did not matter to him in the end. He had accidently left a mark in their mind, a mark he never intended to make on purpose and it would scar them to some degree, his claws leaving behind a gouge they made on accident. Like when a scared dog would nip at the hand that reached for it. Not ment to harm, more ment to warn that if provoked any further than those sharp teeth would do more than just a light nip.

But a very important detail crossed Will's mind that would wound that plan that wanted to from. His dogs were currently being looked after by Alana and he couldn't just drive over to her place request his dogs back in the frantic state he found himself slipping into. Because then she would ask questions, questions Will did not have the time or the mental energy to answer. He could already feel a form of agitated pain begin to swirl inside of him just thinking about the made-up scenario playing in his mind while he continued to stare at Hannibal. Who only looked back at Will, his eyes slightly softened, no longer in that odd balance between surprise and something else. Will could tell he was trying to analyze his emotions, pick him apart and put together a reason for Will's sudden kiss and what was now going through his mind. Which Will could describe as scrambling madness as he tried to make sense of his action.

What did you do Graham, what the hell did you just do! Were the only string of thoughts that stampeded through his mind as he tried to control his breathing and building panic that wanted to erupt inside of him. As he still stood frozen in place as his eyes continued to race around Hannibal's face, refusing to land on any part of the man. From the bridge of his nose where Will quickly noticed a slight scar, to his cheekbones that Will found very sharp and very attractive, towards his lips, with its prominent cupids bow shape. Will could still feel the phantom warmth on his own lips from those and it had the ache slowly begin to form underneath the panic. Begging him to kiss the man again so he could feel that warmth, that

steadiness those lips gave him all over again, but Will pushed that thought out of his head. He couldn't do that, not after he basically forced himself on the man, that he hadn't said a word to after suddenly kissing him. *Fuck, I've been silent for too long, say something Graham!*

"I'm sorry." Were the only words Will could form in his mouth, the only words that broke though the panic havoc that stormed through his brain. An apology for his actions was the only thing that felt semi-right to give the doctor, before he quickly broke free of Hannibal's grasp. Not waiting for a response from him as he briskly walked out of the kitchen. Head slightly bent down and shoulders risen, his body had already begun to form a defensive position as he turned the corner and began to walk towards the front door. The only thing in his mind was to leave the man's house before he made himself into an even bigger fool.

Will reached the front door and he hastily grabbed his coat; he did not exactly care how much force he used to practically rip the jacket off the hook. If his mind wasn't attacking itself or his heart wasn't pounding in his ears, he would have herd the soft rip of stitches popping. Not exactly coming apart, but they sung out a warning to him that the next time he decided to yank the jacket off another hook in the future then there would be consequences for his actions. Will though did not entirely care about the threat of torn fabric. That was the last thing on his chaos wreaked mind that had started to attack itself, once again turning into a battle field as it began to tear itself in half. One side wanted him to stop what he was doing, to face his action head on and see how this night was now going to proceed. Because he still felt that splintering ache that barreled through his whole body, he was beginning to crack even more. Creating an opening for the other side of his mind to take over the battlefield, giving him a stronger reason why he needed to leave the house. He was falling apart, ripping at the seams while he tried to hold himself together with shaky hands, that the more they tried to keep the pieces where they belonged the more the pieces slipped through his grasp. Shattering all over the hardwood floor into a million pieces, being damaged to the point he could see that there was no real chance to put them back together again.

What he was experiencing at the time, he would label as disordered panic, it couldn't be regular panic Will was feeling, no it had to be a level above that. Where no matter how hard he tried to calm himself in some aspect, nothing worked. The panic only grew more frantic as it ran through him, with twisting body, howling lungs, and jagged claws. Where it ran there was tearing and loud screeching, turning his nerves raw in its wake. While one part of him was being wreaked by a battle of side against side, another part of him was being attacked by this seemingly uncontrollable animal. *Get out, get out, get out.* Was all he could really think as Will tried to put on his jack, but his shaky movements made it twice as difficult for him to do so. He really couldn't count how many times he tried to find the proper way to slip his arms though the sleeves or to turn his jacket so it was facing the right way. It only seemed like a pile of fabric in his hands while he tried to remind himself that it was a jacket and he knew how to put it on. But all that was coursing through him was his flight or fight instincts and he chose flight instead of standing around to face what possible reaction Hannibal had in him. *Just put on your damn jacket and get the hell out of here before the casket's lid closes all the way.* Will thought to himself as he finally managed to yank his arm through on of the jacket's sleeves, all he had to do was get the other sleeve to cooperate with him then he would be close to gone.

When Will had hastily walked out of the kitchen after panic words that constructed a flustered apology, Hannibal had found himself frozen in place. As his mind began to process the phenomenon that had graced his lips. Hannibal hardly had moments where he was left speechless, he had come close to those moments. Mostly in little shocks of bewilderment that liked to scurry across his path, like a small rodent that cheated death one too many times. Round ears twitching with every sound that filled the air no matter how loud, beady black eyes that reflected his form as it stared at him for a few seconds, its small mind deciphering if he was threat. All taking place for only a few seconds before it would continue forward with its quick movements leaving Hannibal there with a slight hint of wonder of what encounter had just taken place. This on the other hand was far greater than the slight feeling of bewilderment, it was above the elevated feeling into something only the heavens could understand how he felt.

Because it was not shock, it was not confusion, it laid more towards the term astonishment. That seemed to fit into the slot that opened in his mind as he continued to stand in the silent kitchen. Hannibal would not fool himself when he confessed that there were moments in his time with the other that he often found himself drifting towards the ideas of what Will's lips would feel pressed against his. He knew they would be slightly rougher than his own, brought on from the bad habit Will had of chewing on his bottom lip. Those lips also being plush that was on the list of predictions, he noticed how the bottom lip often naturally pouted outwards in some of the empath's softer facial expressions. Those expressions were when Hannibal would witness one of the many reasons that brought on those more tamed fantasies of his. Though in those ideas the factor of Will making the first move never truly occurred to him, in fact that was the major reason why Hannibal felt the form astonishment that filtered through his mind like a gentle touch of a cold breeze felt on a summer's night in the first place.

Hannibal was aware of the possibility that there might be a form of intimacy that would be shared between them. The confession he had spoken to the man as if the words were intwine with honey sweetened sin and strung together in silver blessed twine, once again proved that blatant truths could help aid in sly games. But this was no longer a sly game when it came to more intimate matters of the heart. Though it was an amusing instrument to play with from time to time, easy to manipulate, easy to break, something Hannibal found himself strumming with deceitful fingers when dealing with others simply for his own amusement. He found that he could not tempt himself to run his fingers over the delicate strings of Wiil's heart, not while his own sat beating in confusion in his chest. Calling out for its brief partner that no longer rested against it. Their cages pressed together, heat and sound echoing back and forth while the owners of the cages held one another. The heart in the opposite cage needed Hannibal's calmer tempo to sooth it, to help guard it from its storming panic. To hold it so they could share their own melody and keep the more racing one under its stable control. Now Hannibal felt his heart longing for more of the astonishing moment, even if it was created in a way he did not truly plan, but he enjoyed none the less.

No, enjoy was not the right word that Hannibal had felt while he had Will's lips pressed lightly against his. Lips that teased him to no end, whether they were curled back in a grimace, baring those sharped tipped canines that Hannibal often found himself urning to feel dig into his flesh as much as his own teeth ached to do to Will's. Or if those false petals simply stayed closed, not letting a single word be birthed through them, they always

somehow managed to flutter into the cannibal's mind, in so many ways he visioned those lips either curled back in an agonizing show of pain; pain caused by his actions alone, twisted back, teeth bared as those lips gave way to sounds that not even a renown symphony could stand against. But he also pictured as of late those lips in a more passive stance in his mind. Visons of temptations where he conjured them bringing him great amount of pleasure that did not rest in the land of macabre, but more on a lust filled plain where pulses of burning desire were finally sustained giving way to a tangled wave of uncaged pleasure. Hannibal was human after all and he did have needs like so many who shared the species, but unlike so many of those he never felt that ache that drove him to connect in such a way that only hot flesh could provide.

What he felt towards Will was above that primitive need, he had felt something from their first interaction, an ache all its own. An ache that craved for more of the man's chaotic beauty that nestled in that bone arena that helped protect and harmed it. It was a deep seeded ache that Hannibal did not know even rested inside of him, it then had clawed its way out if its dark chamber and made its home not only in his mind, but his heart as well. A place no other soul dared to touch, not since it was severely damaged in his youth, mercilessly wrenched out of his young ribcage before bones could form the proper amount of osteoid in them. Now left behind the figments of an imaginary crack was a beating muscle ment to pump blood throughout his body. Where emotions left it to freeze over and never be touched again. Only for that ache decided that was where it would dwell, create its new chamber to nestle into and fixate on the empath in a twisted greed. After that kiss, not only did that ache erupt in a form of unbridle hunger with warped vines that were covered in sharpened thorns, the other ache that called for pleasure that only flesh could help satisfy began to merge into the other. Two feelings that hardly ever touched, only once in a while brushed against one another during where he and Will began to grow their relationship over their time together. Because he would not also deny the shallower part of him that had also fallen for the empaths appearance as well when he had laid eyes on the man, first through photos then in person.

That was when he truly understood the term, "the picture did not do it any justice." Because the saying was indeed correct, no picture taken of the younger man did him any justice. It could capture small parts of Will's outer appeal, for example his barley tamed curls that always seemed to have a mind of their own, his strong jawline that only the well-trimmed facial hair could bring out, because without it the man would fall backwards in age and his already kicked puppy demeanor would consume him even more. The beard was no doubt grown to help chase off that aspect of the man that he tried so hard to sever from himself. And if it was a full body picture well there was always a certain part of the man Hannibal enjoyed taking a guilty glance at from time to time when the empath was not paying attention. Everything else though, had to be experienced in person to help elevate Will Graham's dark beauty as a whole. The sharp retorts, the brash behavior when pushed that was covered by the standoffish behavior that helped conceal his more blatant attitude that would only come out when around strangers or individuals, he was forced to form a relationship with. Once again resembling behavior similar to the strays he formed a family with. It came to a point in Hannibal's mind that even the drawings he had made of the man also could not capture all that was Will. No amount of graphite could convey the enigma that was the younger man, no matter how much effort Hannibal put into those drawings. Every pose he practiced, every scene he placed Will in, from a copy of a statue he once gazed upon and drawn Will's body to mimic, to a scenario that could only be compared to one of Will's

darkest nightmares and Hannibal's twisted fantasies. Drawings that he would rather watch burn by his own hand than to ever let leave his possession. To be in another's hand where uncultured eyes could gaze upon them and feel only a microscopic amount of emotion that he truly felt when he picked up his pencil.

To take all that into heating consideration, him labeling his first experience with Will's lips pressed against his as merely enjoyable would be nothing more than an insult. It could not be considered an understatement, for what he experienced if labeling it anything other than enthralling, captivating, senses altering, would be considered an insult to him. The fact alone that his first kiss with the flighty man had taken place in his own house, in his kitchen and where he dissected pigs in order to create distinct meals out of the only redeemable parts of them. Was more than adequate to have Hannibal not want to change the experience into anything else, even though Will had bridged the gap, had acted first on both of their hidden desires that neither admitted allowed. A desire Hannibal knew he had felt first and for Will, he had to ignite in the empath. Bring out the feeling that rested in the man's chest, that needed a proper spark and coercion to help stir it to life after being starved for so long to the point of none existence. Only to be brought to life by Hannibal's own actions, carful acts of entering Will's person space, to subtle remarks of praises that were never clearly pointed towards one part of him. That way they could hit that one nerve point that had not been calloused over time due to being told the same thing over and over again, words that once promised a slight douse of dopamine that could chase away any negative feeling that might have festered in his mind, soon began to lose that promise. They soon turned into simple words of hollowness that often made Will wonder if there was anything else praise worthy about him, causing a slight spiral of self-doubt and deprecation, followed by a hard disorientated crash that would leave him stumbling. With jagged cracks and chips that would reveal a bitter hollowness that lay underneath the surface that was caused by those over used words of praise; hollowness birthing hollowness. Intertwining together to create an unintentional callus over time, that covered the man. Making it difficult for those words to act as they were intended to do so when they were first spoken to him, now all he felt was the sting of the needle used to inject the dosage; something he could never grow use to even if he tried. That all made it quite easy for Hannibal to create newer forms of praise for the man to listen too, to absorb and let take root where it would linger in his mind and bring its own dosage of warm pleasure that could help chase off the negative numbness that liked to splinter through his mind when left alone for too long.

Like a new ray of light after a heavy storm, that broke through the empty rain clouds, reality finally crept into Hannibal's own mind. He had managed to rip himself away from the loop he had started in his mind. Where he kept replaying the kiss over in his mind, rewinding to when Will had stepped forward and hastily pressed his lips to his to when Will pulled away. Then Hannibal found himself pressing rewind and letting the scene start all over again. If had continued the loop he risked ruining the visual, the sensation he felt; though he highly doubted that, ruining the moment that Will's lips touched him seemed almost foolish to think. But what was foolish was how he was standing in the middle of his kitchen looking awestruck, while Will had made a retreat towards the front door.

What the hell was I thinking, what in the nine rings of hell was I actually thinking! Will demanded of himself as he finally managed to wrestle his jacket on. *Kissing Hannibal Lecter like that, no warning, out of nowhere! God, Graham are you trying to do demolish another*

relationship? What even is our relationship? He asked himself as he began to hastily search through his pockets. *Where the hell are my keys!* Will felt like his mind was a hurricane of accusations and demands, swirling together at high speed and lashing out with sharp force that left no room for correct answers. *I can't believe I kissed him, just like that! Why would I even, where did I get the nerves to, it's one thing to have erotic dreams, it's another to actually kiss the man! Fuck where are my keys at?* Will shoved his hands in his jacket pockets, his front and back pockets of his pants and then his jacket pockets. Until finally after turning his jacket pockets inside out he watched as they fell to the hardwood floor making a loud clattering sound. *Shit.* He internally hissed before he bent down to pick them up, only when he held the key ring, did it finally occur to him like the sharp hard sound of metal hitting hardwood floor. Hannibal had driven him there. *Maybe I can call a cab, it's not that late in the night.* Will found himself contemplating as he felt his fingers clench around his keys, their metal teeth biting into his flesh, sending out small signals of pain to his brain. Signals that shouted at him to stop before more damage could be made, but he did not care at, him gripping his keys kept him from fully slipping away into another hurricane of self-attack. It also kept him away from actually taking his cellphone out of his pocket and calling a cab service and then spending God knows how many minutes on the front porch. No, not the front porch perhaps the nearest street corner. There he could wait for a cab that would drive him back to his isolation. Where he would then pack up his car and drive even furth into the realm of isolation and he could find that part of him that flickered and freeze it in the ice.

He wouldn't care what he looked like standing on the corner of a street filled with houses that cost more than his own plus his college tuition combined and still not feel the burden of a giant chunk missing from their bank account. Though the idea of him standing in the dark on a street corner in a borrowed sweater that did not match the jacket worn over it. Near a neighborhood that he did not belong to, helped to keep his hand from pulling his phone out and making a call; it did not exactly drive away the idea in general though. *Oh God, I'm still in his sweater*. Will inwardly groaned as he remembered that he was persuaded into wearing because his got wet. Now instead of just contemplating on waiting on the street corner for a cab he had yet to call, he also threw on the idea of being a thief as well. Technically he wouldn't be a thief if he simply mailed the sweater back to the man, postage wasn't that big of a price to pay if he could avoid the awkwardness that awaited to be hatched between the two or maybe he could just leave it on the coat rack and just zip of his jacket. If he was going to risk looking ridiculous or possibly getting arrested for being a sore thumb might as well go big or go home, because how he felt that wouldn't be too farfetched of a prediction if he did decide to call a cab and go wait on the street corner. What was one more block to stack on the tilting tower that was already falling over. Ready to crush him and would that really be that bad, to let the weight break every part of him until there was nothing left to identify of him? No, he couldn't let that happen, but then again why couldn't he?

Why is everything so damn complicated, why can't things be simple, black, and white? He could feel the hurricane threating to swallow him whole again and he also felt the lack of a resistance to not let that happen again. Maybe he needed that chaos to attack his mind, like a rabid animal with a foaming mouth and running on twisted aggression that clouded its inflamed brain. That way his body could just go on panic auto pilot, that way he could stop thinking, simply act in the moment and regret everything later. When he was no longer in Hannibal's home, when he was no longer in Hannibal's sweater, when he was all by himself. In blissful silence that will soon wrap around his body and weigh him down with its partner;

isolation. All he had to do was let that part of his mind take over similar to how it had back in the courthouse, force that fuzz to reclaim his mind once more that way he could shut everything off for a little while. So, he could slip somewhere deep into his mind where the outside world could not touch him, could not bring anymore complications onto him. He just needed to drift off to into that waiting stream, until the hurricane passed, until the animal let go of him, until everything could come to a halt.

A steady hand on his left shoulder was all it took to keep him from being dragged into that hurricane. From keeping that rabid animal from biting into his flesh, from any hopes of slipping away into that promised land of nothing. A blink and it would all be over moment taken from him and a part of Will wanted to fight to have it back. To have the option still available to him, rather he wanted to take that route or not. But it was gone thanks to that warm hand on his shoulder that he could feel pass on roots into his body, feel them creeping through his veins as the mapped their way towards his brain. Spreading a small dosage of calmness into that still ongoing battle, where the roots would soon cause the canons to stop there bellowing and the guns to stop their sharp precise shots. Where everything would settle down, leaving nothing, but debris behind as enemies dropped their weapons and stood across from each other. Wondering if what they were fighting for was actually worth the bloodshed, the havoc they had caused, or if all of it was caused because they all decided to pull the trigger first and ask questions later. To aim and fire before thinking of a solution that could spare the person, they both fought to protect, they both wanted the best outcome for in order to preserve what could not handle the blows reality thrusted at him with a sharpened point and tearing blade. But instead, they were threating to rip apart, to make a victim, with their own over thinking instinct to shield from the oncoming thrust.

Now it all had stopped; everything came to a standstill all because of a simple hand on Will's shoulder. But it was not a simple hand on his shoulder, not something he could push off of him so he could walk away. It kept him somewhat grounded and kept the chaotic buzz of panic at bay. For how long? Will couldn't say for sure, perhaps a simple fleeting moment and then it would all come crashing back on him like an icy wave digging through his flesh and into his bones. Freezing him from the inside out until he could no longer feel anything, but its frozen claws. But then again, the hand could chase the feeling away for as long as it made claim of his left shoulder and even perhaps after it was removed; if he let it. Though a twitching agitated part of him called and begged for him to jerk his shoulder back, to step away from the sturdy touch and take that step towards the door instead. Instead, his eyes looked at the hand on his left shoulder, taking in each digit, each well taken care of nail that merged into well-kept cuticles. Then the hand that produced the warmth that seeped into his shoulder, the prominent veins that still showed even when the hand was relaxed; an aspect Will found oddly pleasing to look at, to trace with his eyes as if they were curves in sand. To follow the anatomical paths that held Hannibal's blood, that helped sustain him life as they traveled towards his arms. Carrying the natural warm life liquid in its pulsing road, where they would disappear under thicker flesh and towards their destination.

The heart, Will wondered if Hannibal could feel his rabbits pace heartbeat through his shoulder, he also wondered what Hannibal's own beat felt like, did it also start to race at some point or like how the doctor always presented himself, composed. Did it even speed up at least once, did it perhaps flutter slightly or even risk stopping? Maybe Will was simply fooling himself thinking he had any of those effects on the regal man, who's emotions were

always hard to translate unless granted by him for others to see more easily. Given permission to gaze upon his truer emotion that he hid so effortlessly behind false ones, ones used to deceive others into feeling they understood how he felt on the matter when in reality he controlled the scenario and that understanding was nothing, but a ploy another sign on how he was able to manipulate the situation he was in. At the moment though Will could not bring himself to look upon Hannibal's face, even if there was a high chance it would be another well sculpted lie to help either aggravate his already self-destructive mind or to sooth it further.

Even if he could not bring himself to look the man in the face, he still stood still and let his eyes travel up the man's arm, towards his square shoulders and then his neck. Where his eyes fixated on his Adam's apple for the longest time, afraid to travel even towards Hannibal's chin, because Will knew he would not stop there, he couldn't keep his eyes from wondering towards those deep pools of maroon. In those traps laid the real emotions, no matter how hard Hannibal might try to command his other facial tics, no matter how perfect he could pose them into conveying anything other than how he felt. It was his eyes that he often had trouble keeping a command on, the eyes that Will avoided as if they were a knife's skin piercing tip, or an inescapable cage where the lock had been destroyed and the walls made from unbreakable material. Will could already feel his skin give under the knifes point, he could already hear the echo of the cage door slamming shut behind him. He could also feel the pull of those eyes, waiting, wanting his to meet with them. So, they could share those true emotions they held and have them wash over him in whatever form they take, which made Will even more hesitant to meet them. He did not know if he could handle the onslaught of whatever laid dormant in Hannibal, because even if the man could be complex with his emotions, show little of what he felt or didn't, when he did give the chance to reveal what he felt it came through like a heatwave. It was controlled and precise as it wrapped around the victim and drowned them in the skin sticking heat that made one ache for even a simple breeze or a spot in the shade. Held them with a grip that could not be deciphered as hostile or not, leaving the mind at a stalemate on rather it should struggle to break free. All while the heat slowly consumed and over powered them, drowning them slowly and painlessly in an attempt to keep the victim docile during the attack.

Victim there again that word prattled through Will's thoughts, latching onto him like a dog prong collar, used to keep a dog from pulling on the leash. Digging into his flesh every time he tried to pull away from being given the label as a victim, the prongs threatened to break the skin of his throat, but he knew they wouldn't. They only brought discomfort, pressure to his windpipe as individual rods of metal pressed into him as he continued to pull away from being branded with the label. Will knew deep down that he was a victim, he was a victim of the Black Window, he was a victim to Miranda's web of lies and he was a victim to her affection that was never ment to be. A mistake that somehow grown and twisted into something that was ment to stay in the light where it could show the world its beauty, but craved the intimacy of the darkness where it could hide and wait. Will was blinded by emotions that once started out false, but he somehow managed to make them real. Then finally he had become a victim to his own isolated heart, that had beaten so tenderly when given affection, when another heart reached out for it in what felt like years, offering companionship in a form that was familiar yet still strange. And what did he do? He let his heart become its own victim, he couldn't protect it like he should have, all those barriers he had kept up for so long, they did nothing to protect it from the hidden invasion. Like how he

was his hearts own victim, his heart was his. But now he risked becoming another victim all over again, because Will knew if he looked into Hannibal's eyes, he would witness those emotions that laid under the surface calling out to him to understand and understand he would. In more complex ways than one and he did not know if he could face the truth to the situation that he had caused.

Soon though he felt the pull, the prongs digging into his flesh and his eyes began to move up the other's face, past his chin, past his lips, and past his nose. Until he met their destination and finally things began to lock into place, no more were his thoughts swirling around, devouring one another as they tried to scream the loudest to be heard first and to be the one to direct his actions. No more did his heart race at a speed to where he felt his ribs crack under the constant abuse, everything finally stood still for Will, just like how the hand on his shoulder wanted him to feel. Will did not feel the need to race out the door and not look back, because in the moment he just wanted to stand there with Hannibal and be in his presence, because nothing felt chaotic, nothing felt like a decision had to be made before the last strand of sand joined the rest of its fallen brothers at the bottom of the hour glass, time wasn't running out for Will. But that did not mean that it had stopped completely, because the more Will stared into those calm eyes that held his like hands holding a frighten bird. There was a strength behind them, that once released fully could possibly crush him, so they restrained themselves in order to preserve Will's being while they kept his company.

A thought crawled across Will's mind like a scuttling cockroach birthed in one of those motel's he had stepped foot in for months, infesting manmade filth; a mixture of unidentified mold and possibly hazardous mildew that could not wait to latch onto something warm and alive. That is where the roaches pestering lives flourished as they crawled on every surface, they could claim from matted worn out carpets whose color was lost over time thanks to uncaring owners. All the way up the stained or chipped walls that sometimes-held dents from uncaring guests to the ceiling. Where if one was lucky, it was a water stain they were staring up at, at night as they laid upon a lumpy mattress that they also hoped smelled of simply dust and the sheets were stiff because of starch and nothing else. The room was the roach's whole world they flourished in before being caught; no longer able to hide in the corner of unexpected eyes, then squashed by either a shoe or any other quickly grabbed object directed to be the roach's executioner. The thought was too quick to be killed it had moved into a spot Will was unable to reach before he could let it fully manifest and focus on. *Do not let yourself drown.*

Though Will wanted to succumb to the man's blatant act of calming him in the moment to let it lay on top of him and warn off the impending chaos. That wanted to make his skin prickle and nerves ache with pent up energy that would not go away, until all of him was replaced with a live wire waiting to lash out. Will found himself starting to fight against the current, not letting Hannibal pull him in. Which did not make sense to him, a part of him felt comfort in knowing that he had not really been rejected, yet another part did not believe the idea. As if weary of what those emotions could actually mean and what he wished them to mean, it had him thinking of that old saying. *Once bitten twice as shy.* Was that how he was going to be from now on, questioning every gesture, every simple act that could be portrayed as affection, as desire for him as something that it wasn't. Was he doomed to over think every possible idea that someone out in the world could ever want him, ever feel an ache of hunger for him, for all of him not just one part of himself.

He didn't really believe in the idea, at this point it was like believing in Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy or the Easter Bunny. Something that a kid could hang onto for some form of whimsy in the world, a mythical being that was made to bring joy to the youth and also keep them in line from time to time until they grew older and realized that the magic that those characters held did not truly exist in the world. They were something their parents made up for them to latch onto before they reached the age of ten. If they were lucky, unlike himself who grew up knowing those figures were nothing but made of characters. There was no Santa Claus for him to leave cookies out for on Christmas Eve, no fairy leaving him a quarter under his pillow every time a tooth came out of his mouth and no large rabbit giving him a chocolate egg on a magical Sunday. Instead, he grew up in stone cold reality. If his tooth fell out oh well just had to wait for his adult tooth to grow in, if he only got one gift for Christmas or if he even celebrated Christmas that year, he should keep his mouth shut and be grateful and Easter Sunday was just any other Sunday, dressing in a scratchy hand-me down suit that took him several years to grow into properly, trek down to whatever church the town had and sit on uncomfortable pews while a man preached about stories he had heard over a thousand times about a God Will still found himself questioning, over two decades later. Now he was questioning rather or not if the emotions he felt leaking out of Hannibal like tendrils of ink and wrapping around his mind and body were real and not something he was fooling himself into believing.

Before he could once again go down that winding path of what if's all over again, repeating a worn-down cycle and become the snake that was devouring itself. Reality made its presence clear in Will's mind. Weighing itself down on top of him until he felt his feet press into the polished floors and then threaten to go through it. He had kissed Hannibal Lecter. Will opened his mouth once again, not sure what was going to come out; either another poor excuse for an apology or an explanation on why he did what he did.

"If you are about to iterate an apology, I'd would like to request you reframe from doing so." Hannibal spoke with a slight look that was on the edge of being both firm, yet at the same time good natured. As if to show that he was serious, but at the same time trying to keep the tone light in order to keep Will from either backing down or lashing out in some way. Hannibal could tell this would be another tight rope act for the two, as they both stood on opposite ends of the pulled rope. Watching for the others action to help indicate where to place their own weight to help navigate the balancing act.

Will let out a chuff of air and shook his head. "That's one way to tell me to shut up, before I dig myself a new grave."

"Is that what you were doing," Hannibal removed his hand from Will's shoulder, sure that the man wasn't going to take off on him. "Because through my point of view it looked as though you were about to take off into the night, never to be seen." Hannibal angled his head slightly taking in Will's stiffened body that showed promise of relaxing. "With the sweater I offered to you."

Another dry laugh escaped Will's lips as he ran a hand through his hair and adjust his stance. Shifted his weight from one foot to the other, his grip on his keys still obvious, but showed signs of loosening if Hannibal kept him engaged in conversation. "Yeah, I guess it does look like that doesn't it, but you still have mine in your dryer so we could call it an even trade."

Will said with a nonchalant gesture of his hand once it had finished being run through his hair. Hannibal angled his head slightly with eyebrow slightly raised at Will's statement. "Alright so it wouldn't be an even trade."

"I wouldn't verbalize that, but I would offer a fair trade would be an explanation on to why you decided to take off like you did." Hannibal said as if the reason wasn't completely obvious on to why Will was nearly out the door. The look Will gave him, spoke that sentence as he stared at the man as if it wasn't completely obvious why.

"Hannibal, I kissed you."

"Yes, I am aware of the fact you and I did share an intimate exchange a moment ago in my kitchen." The way Hannibal said it, it sounded as though the two simply shared a cup of coffee together and did not in fact had their lips pressed together in a hasten act of intimacy that Will had brought forth. It was baffling to the empath how Hannibal could be so calm by the idea while he on the other hand was whirlwind of emotions just waiting to go through a city so he could cause some form a havoc to anything other than himself. "Though I could see why it might start an underline act of panic in some, I do not see why it has manifested in you." Hannibal lied, he knew why Will had taken off like he had, the man realized that he had just destroyed one of if not the largest of his own newly formed barricades that he kept everyone behind. While he stayed protected on the other side, from those he labeled as possible threats, kept at a distance in order to preserve the newly made self-inside that could stand the world around him with caution. Will had become a beast at some point, a beast that found itself scratching at the iron walls, leaving behind marks as it whined for companionship from the first of its kind to call out to it. Then when a call answered the whine from the lonesome beast it acted, barreling through the walls without hesitation. Once when the debris was clear and the beast stood out in the open, it finally understood what it had accomplished. Head snapping from side to side as its tail slowly tucked itself between its hindlegs, claws anxiously tapping on the ground before its head lowered as well. Once it realized it was out in the open and that it was no longer protected by walls it once fought against, it now stood there in realization and the beast could not handle the idea that it could be standing there alone. With no other to show it the affection it truly needed, no other to greet it, but all that it faced was nothing. So instead of waiting for a response or an indication that another one of its kind was waiting for it, the poor skittish creature ran.

Will ran his hand through his hair once more in a more nerve racked manner before roughly gripping the curls near his neck. "Hannibal, I kissed you."

"Yes, you keep saying that as though I was not there." Hannibal said with a small amount of amusement in his voice, clear he wanted to hear Will explain his discomfort. To drag it out into the open and watch it wither in the light, flaring about, whipping in different direction. All while Hannibal watched with jagged fascination and twisted glee. "Tell me Will, if you had done this with let's say Doctor Bloom or perhaps Miss. Katz would you be having the same reaction?" The look Hannibal gave him spoke a volume that could have rivaled one of Jack's outbursts, before it slowly died down and Will took in Hannibal's question as he turned it onto himself.

Will turned his gaze away from the man as he pondered the question for a few long beats. Before he let out a slight breath through his nose indicating he came to some form of an answer he could speak life into. “I want to say no, but to be honest I don’t really know. Perhaps Alana, because she would feel obligated as a psychiatrist to let me down easy and suggest we stay friends.” Hannibal made a head motion to indicate he understood what Will ment, if he kissed Alana, he faced a repercussion that followed the idea of kissing a psychiatrist that followed the rules so thoroughly, unlike Hannibal who always seemed to acknowledge them, but never showed signs of fully respecting them. They just existed as a guide, To Hannibal they were like the lines in a children’s coloring book. They made an image that he was supposed to fill with whatever color he wanted, but that didn’t stop the man from transforming the premade design into something of his liking. To the point where the picture that laid on the page barely showed a trace of what was ment to be, hidden under the splashes of color that ran neatly over the page covering permanent lines as if mocking them, taunting them by showing that that held no real bearings on him, that he created what he wanted either way, but he still took the lines into some considerations, if he was ever called out for his act.

Though Will had always been attracted to Alana, especially when she wore a subtle amount of makeup, when her hair was left down so it freely bounced with each of her steps as her soft waves caught the light so easily and how she always managed to incorporate some sort of floral print in her outfit. It all helped lead into Alana’s down to earth attitude that she bared for the world with ease. Will would describe her as soft and warm like first month of spring, coming in after a harsh winter to help soothe the jagged edges left behind, but she still held a sharp bite when pushed too far and Will liked that about her. Alana presented herself with good intention when it came to Will’s mental stability, her action did not exactly push Will, more like attempted to lead him in the right direction and hoped he followed. She gave him space without giving him space, but she still held the doctorate, she still admitted to being curious about Will and try as she might she still viewed him through the eyes of a psychiatrist. That was something Will did not know if he could properly step around, the idea she would always see him as something on the verge of breaking and needed to be looked over with care. So, if he ever decided to pursue her in some compacity Will knew he would risk rejection at some point.

“And what of Miss. Katz?” Hannibal asked coaxing Will to continue, as he fed on Will’s uncertainty and discomfort. He needed Will to purge his mind of what still laid in there causing him to act with so much uncertainty. Will made a lulling notion with his head as he took in the other half of the full question. Because though Beverly was attractive, where Alana was soft first then shown signs of a harder personality, Beverly was the opposite in some degree, she didn’t let the world step all over her, she did not wear her heart on her sleeve. No, she reserved that side of herself for those she held close and Will was one of those people she opened herself for first even though she did not have to, she could have treated him like how others tended to, as someone to keep at arm’s length and let him simply exist while he worked. But she had while she hoped he would follow her lead and Will did. Beverely also carried herself with a confidence that most wished they had. Will wouldn’t lie to himself when they first started to work together, he found himself drawn to her no bullshit attitude, he even found her softer more caring side attractive, watching how she easily shifted between the two was nice and hell she could sometimes pick up when he was in distress faster than anyone else on the team. Beverly had managed to check off boxes in Will’s mind

that he did not know existed, when he looked towards a partner and he wasn't exactly turned away from the idea either. Will enjoyed how Beverly treated him like a team member, how she didn't put up with his attuited when he would become hostile because of a case they were working on, but she didn't go around trying to correct it like Jack would. She showed she had the ability to keep him in line when he needed to be, but she didn't exactly ask him to change his behavior as a whole just to simply watch it. She wasn't afraid of him, of his oddities like everyone else around him; he could even tell there was a slight uneasiness hiding under Alana whenever something shifted against him, but not with Beverly. She seen him as odd and simply rolled with it and he liked that about her. Over their time spent together in and out of the field, Will found more comfort in the idea of having her as a friend; even though she imposed the relationship first, over the idea of an intimate relationship. So, if he was being completely honest with himself the idea of actually kissing Beverly at some point never crossed his mind like the idea of kissing Alana did.

"Honestly, I don't believe I would have reacted that way either if Beverly and I ever did kiss. If anything, it would just be completely awkward afterwards and we would both swear not to speak about it again." Will said with a slight shrug.

"If I might theorize, there could be a reason behind the flighty behavior after our intimate moment lying beneath the fact that I am a psychiatrist and we both know how you truly feel about that field of work." Hannibal said as a look of false contemplation filtered through his features as if he was actually looking for a real reason to why Will had to reacted like he had and not simply trying to drag the problem out for as long as he could just to watch Will squirm, before giving into defeat.

"Yes, but let's face it, out of the few psychiatrists that I know, you don't exactly fit the stereotypical mold that often puts me on a hard edge." Will added. "So, it's safe to assume that wasn't what set off the act of fleeting into the night." Will pointed out as he gestured loosely towards the front door before he slid his hands to rest on his hips. Though the acknowledgement could seem as a soft insult to some in Hannibal's field, Alana would come off as confused at the remark not sure how to take it when she prided herself in her work. Not sure if it was a compliment to her individuality or the idea, she did not practice her field correct, but in the end give a polite yet puzzled smile. While someone like Chilton would scoff at first give an over exaggerated eye roll, showing no interest in what Will ment, before analyzing the others words to death and only when they were buried would he decide if he was offended. Hannibal on the other hand took Will's words as a compliment, letting the idea Will saw him as acentric in his way when it came the ways he worked. Just enough outside the lines to be caught by those who he let see him and close enough to go under the radar, able to go back and forth in a way to never catch the wondering eye. And if it ever came to a claim a patient might make or another doctor might point out he could always blame it all on a misunderstanding or fain ignorance; he had before.

But hearing Will point it out, all it did was make that inner beast purr ever so slightly, knowing that his ways of handling the other when it came to their sessions no longer set Will off, that he was comfortable with their time together. No longer seeing it as a threat like when they were still new to each other and though a part of Hannibal did not exactly enjoy the idea that Will did not see Hannibal as a threat in the term of a psychiatrist; he always cherished the idea he could make Will bristle with a simple breath that threaten to be in the form of the act

of psychoanalyzing his thoughts and behavior. Yet he did enjoy the fact he mange to go to where no other could. Able to claim the fact Will felt comfortable in his office, with his practice then with perhaps Alana, the one doctor Will knew longer, who should have had that rare slot already filled, but was too cautious to push. Where Hannibal did not hold back and that was how he was able to go to a depth that only the other two could fantasize about.

“If that is the case then perhaps the only other option is that.”

“If you are about to suggest that I acted that way because we are both men, then I’m going to request for you to refrain from doing so.” Will interjected, which only slightly caught Hannibal by surprise, surprised that Will had to jumped to an observation that Hannibal was only throwing a way as another weak excuse that held no sustenance. It was like adding a simple garnish to a plate that honestly did nothing to enhance the flavor or take away from the meal, it simply sat on the plate not to be eaten, but to fill in the space. The other part of the doctor found slight pleasure when Will retorted using his own words against him. A small act of reflection ment to deflect the heavier part of the subject that might have stepped far too close to a comfort line Will did not want to be crossed.

“I was simply making an observation,” Hannibal began, “trying to eliminate the possible reasons on to why you reacted the way you had.” Hannibal spoke once again his words laced in lies as they slithered out of his mouth in false help. A long with a small goal of agitating Will, in some form that would keep him grounded in a way where he felt the need to stand and defend himself. Instead of letting Hannibal make a claim that might paint him in a light Will did not exactly like.

“Well, I’d hate to deconstruct your observation, but you couldn’t be the farthest from the truth.” Will said. “I didn’t run off because I was having some,” Will made a loose gesture as he came up with the right words to help finish off his sentence, “sexuality crisis.”

There it was the opening Hannibal wanted to see, to hear the other make in the moment of their conversation that was ment to lead around the real root of everything. He had mange to take the other by the unexpected hand and begin their little dance right there in the entryway. All without Will suspecting it. Their song though it did not hold a title, it existed with a mixture of wind instruments like a flute, the rest woodwind like an oboe, bassoon or even a saxophone perhaps. Along with soft keys of both Will’s piano and his harpsicord as they sang off each other. Showing how they, both existed in the same world, same being, but branched off at one point in their making. Hannibal had already begun to compose the piece that he heard grace his mind and felt etched into his soul to paper. Like his sketches of Will, it laid safely tucked away where only he could see it, touch it, add to it. Let it grow just like their relationship and change like it as well. From times it would be soft like the finest feathers of a growing owlet, to harsh and jagged similar to pieces of shattered stain glass that even though clearly broken could still catch the sun’s rays and display their brilliant colors.

“Then why don’t you enlighten me,” Hannibal challenged tilting his head to his side, the small sphynx like smile playing at lips that Will could still feel the soft warmth on his own. “Why did you briskly walk out of my kitchen as though the heaves were crumbling and hell was rising from the cracks?” Will let out a defeated breath which caused his shoulders to sag as the air left him, his head tilted upward towards the ceiling as he found it would be easier to

not look at Hannibal for a moment. As he realized he had somehow walked into his own trap, falling for another ploy to have him slip on himself. Will felt the need to curse himself out for not learning from the last time Hannibal had manage to pull him out into opening up. When all he wanted to do was remain quiet, let what he was feeling stir inside of him for a few days then let it slowly rot until there was nothing there anymore. Just like he had after Miranda, let those feelings begin their decaying process and hell they were almost gone until Hannibal had cornered him in his office. Will knew the feeling, déjà vu, it was similar to how familiarity slowly trickled into your mind as if you stepped outside expecting sun, but felt the soft touch of a cold drop of rain. Except it was only one drop, a fleeting kiss and nothing more. And like that one drop of rain that had your mind pondering if the sky was actually clear that was what Will was starting to feel as he sunk into a moment that only played out a few days ago. But instead of feeling a blistering anger that cracked him open and let something slither out into the world for a few seconds before crawling back in, what laid behind the chips was something not quite docile, but cautious, open almost.

“Because I can’t.” Will confessed, his voice not exactly in the tone of being defeated, but close to it. All it would take would be one more blow and he would crumble. Hannibal had to figure out if he could ignore the urge to give Will that fatal blow, to watch him crumble into beautiful pieces of stain glass, to watch as they fell to the floor and broke into more colorful pieces of Will. To the point if Hannibal dared to bend down and pick up a jagged piece it would easily cut his skin, causing sweet liquid life to drip down his palm, warm and vile just like himself. He could watch for hours as the small stream of red would drip and run from him. Following the curve of his features like the water follows the etches of the earth they made as time passed. As his blood slowly began to mix with Will’s shattered remains, the one that he still held between his blood touched fingers and the ones that lay on the wooden floor. Knowing that they had received some form of revenge to take out on the man that let him crumble. But instead of giving Will that fatal blow, forcing that mouth; that he would not mind exploring even more at the moment and not just with his tongue, Hannibal stood there. Not uttering a single word, he would be patient with Will. Let him speak in his own time or else he risked another break in their performance and Hannibal stressed that though the break was tantalizing it would be far more permanent at this point.

Will took another deep breath as he lowered his head to face the floor, he shook it lightly as he came to terms with the rest of the sentence that would reveal the twisting desire to flee and the stabbing desire to face what they just experienced together. “Because I don’t know if I can handle being wrong again.” Will swallowed the growing lump in his throat as he licked his bottom lip before sinking his top teeth into to the undeserved flesh. “I don’t trust myself enough to interpret your actual feelings,” Will shook his head slightly as his eyebrows knitted together as he pushed though the mess that was his feelings and thoughts. “I’m afraid of all this being another lie that I let myself believe and in reality, I refused to see the truth that lay behind the act of seconds of intimacy that I found myself drawn to by your words.”

There it was the root of the problem that dug so deep into Will’s mind that it began to spread out and not let him escape the torment that it had snared him in from the moment Miranda had sunk her sharp teeth into his unexpected flesh, injecting him with her venom and letting him lie there in her web as a small meal for her to return to every other night when her craving for the slaughter she caused could not quench her appetite. Could not find solace in that certain form of hunger that still laid under her need for revenge taken in the form of

sergeants of men she had faced in her life. Will stood in front of Hannibal in a state of pure vulnerability, uncertain of who or what to believe anymore, the world once again bared its ungrateful teeth at the empath and bit him. In return though, the act it had granted Hannibal the moment to cherish once again after it had toyed with him for months.

Because it wasn't Will Graham who stood by his door, it wasn't Will Graham who was draped in Hannibal's sweater, it wasn't Will Graham who held his keys tightly in his hand and was trying to decide on which way to take the night. No, who stood in front of him was no other than the Norse legend Fenrir. With his head hung low as he tried to not crumple under the weight of unbreakable gold chains that hung off his body. Keeping him in place as he waited for the blessed or cursed; depending on the point of view, day when he could finally break free. This was who was standing in front of the good doctor. A beast with a gift feared by those below it and destined to be doomed from birth because of his power. With no inclination on where his morals truly lied or when his teeth might be bared next, all while weary eyes watched over him and waited. Waited for him to strike, waited for him to show the first sign of turning feral.

Though Hannibal waited with baited breath for the day Will turned feral, he could not let his mind wonder once more into that fantasy. Not while something far more palpable stood right in front of him. A being with chains thrown upon him from another, in need of freedom. Freedom Hannibal knew deep inside only he could gift the other, but in the form of freedom that would be held by one another. A weight that did not ache when draped over his body, but brought a form of comfort, unlike the golden chains that still hung on his frame that Will could not escape, not without Hannibal's assistance.

Dare I say this once more Rhettford, but you were indeed correct. Hannibal thought as he gazed upon the display Will painted for him, head hung low slight tilted to the side as he could still not find it in him to look directly at the doctor. While his heart lay on the floor between their feet beating slowly, no longer that fast pace that threaten to break bones ment to protect it. Now that it was out in the open for the gods to look down upon it no longer felt the need to fight against Will. *That this new found form of rawness and vulnerability is quite easy for any to come by and pick up. But instead of it being anyone who stumbled upon this sight, it was I and I intend to cherish it with deep hunger.* Hannibal thought as he let Will stew in his spot, taking notice how the other's hand still clenched his car keys in a tight grip that Hannibal began to predict a few drops of blood to begin seeping through those fingers at any moment. *Just look at you my dear Will, your heart opens once more and this time for the right being to gaze upon it as it beats out for mine once again. Well do not worry, because its rightful partner is ready to answer once again and this time, I do not intend to let it go.* This was the moment for Hannibal once more to strike, but in a way that wasn't produced by smoke and mirrors that hid a darker meaning behind his act. No, this once more will be an act of truth, Will had once more made the first move in revealing apart of himself to Hannibal, opened his cracked shell and let the man witness what was causing him to act, it was now the others to as well and he would with devotion.

Will heard the sound of well-polished shoes clicking against just as well-polished hard wood floors, before they entered his line of sight. But when those shoes stopped, he felt a warmth placed on the side of his face, five fingers delicately cupping his left cheek with a touch that both held him as if he was made of porcelain, but also made of ivory. Showing that though

this moment called for a fine touch, Hannibal was showing that Will wasn't fragile, he wasn't weak, he wasn't going to shatter at any moment. Not while Hannibal held him, not while they stood once more inches apart, staring into one another eyes and Will could not find the urge to break such a contact. Always sharp dissecting eyes, that once more grew soft in his presence, the crinkles that housed them smoothed giving way to a hidden vulnerability only ment for Will's searching eyes that perched with Hannibal's. Once more Will felt that rising panic that loved to claw its way up his spine in jagged motions as tendrils dug into nerves causing a tingling sensation to spread as it grew close to his brain. Where it would spread like a weed, until its thorns poked through his veins then his skin, to the point he was clawing at his body to get rid of the infection that was over taking him.

"Hannibal, I." Will found his words slowly slipping away from him when he noticed Hannibal began to lean closer towards him, his body moved effortlessly as though it made of smoke, nothing but an even movement that was made of an eloquent motion that was not made of a solid material. It made Will feel a familiar burst of adrenalin that made his heart quicken once again, along with his blood to start to rise in temperature, not to the point of boiling, but like a steaming cup of freshly made coffee like the one he had only a few minutes ago, that he could still taste the lingering earthy blend on the back of his tongue. Will watched with slightly wide eyes as Hannibal continue to lean in and began to mimic how the older man slowly closed his eyes. Will felt his mind slowly come to a halt, not a screeching stop, as if he stomped on the breaks, but it was a smooth ease into it. Similar to how Hannibal moved in close to him.

Will felt Hannibal's sturdy chest press against his, his strong heart beat thumped through his ribcage and into his. Will's own heartbeat began to once more call out to the other that was kept away by a wall of flesh, muscles, and bones, he began to guild Will to move his head close. So, he was no longer doing all the moving and Will didn't fight against the guide, instead he welcomed it. Part of him was tired of acting on his own, it was as if that first kiss that he had, rendered him disorganized into make any more moves on that sort of level. As if his mind wanted Hannibal to lead the way into what Will could presume would be a more of a reassurance kiss, because Will knew deep down Hannibal would not want a do over. No, because the man enjoyed Will's unpredictable nature even if he never spoke of it, Will sometimes could sense it. Though the man lived to be in control, organization by his hand, he still craved uncertainty from time to time or else risk becoming bored and numb to the world around him. And that kiss Will gave him in the kitchen was the biggest act of unpredictability he could gift the other. This meant that this kiss that Hannibal was about to return to him was something that would reveal more to how the good doctor felt and help ease that last shred of emotions that had Will scattered all over the place and he found himself yearning for that. For once he would like to be gifted certainty and not have to question if all this was another ploy either from himself or someone else.

Will's eyes fluttered close as he was guided forward and he felt the addition of Hannibal's hand on the left side of his waist. His thumb pressing ever so slightly into his stomach as his fingers lightly gripped his jacket, all in a way to steady Will and help coax him closer. Which worked because Will took a step closer, helping bridge the rest of the gap that still existed between them and that was when their lips finally reconnected. Pressing together once again, but this time not in a hasten embrace where emotions flooded the mind and body like a raging river, before everything fogged over and what was left was nothing, but uncontrolled

actions left to be seconded guessed when over. No, this time was more fulfilling in the sense it was ment to prove that what happened earlier was no mistake that what happened actually did the opposite of what Will feared, instead of burning a bridge, destroying yet another relationship, it in fact helped. It put down support beams, created a stronger foundation for them to stand on while they crossed this new path that in the back of Will's mind seemed to be created a long time ago. As if someone had started to lay down a trail for him to walk down when he felt was the right time, but while that person waited for Will, they made sure the pathway was perfect for him to take.

The sound of keys hitting the floor replayed itself as Will found himself relaxing into the kiss, he felt Hannibal's thumb gently brush back and forth under his eye as his other hand ever so slightly tighten on his side. Two layers of fabric bunching together under his hand as if making sure to keep Will in place this time instead of letting him slip away like before. Hannibal wanted, no he needed Will to stay put, to experience what he wanted Will to feel from him, so he could understand what was truly happening between them. And Will wanted the same thing at this point, he no longer wanted to run off and hide himself in isolation, that idea a fleeting memory as he embraced the affection Hannibal was gifting him. Affection that did not hold any double meaning, that could be turned inside out and made into something that would later come and stab him in the back. This affection was real, it was genuine and Hannibal seemed almost overcome with the need to prove to Will that what he felt for the empath was real. Will was pretty sure Hannibal would find a way to make his affection, his attraction for him into a piece of art for the man in the more elaborate way possible. With twisted limbs that looked both unnatural and natural, the use or negative spacing, splashes of colors both muted and vibrant. All coming together in the form that only he and Will could understand when they looked upon it.

Will felt himself opening slowly for the kiss, as he reached out with a slightly hesitant hand to rest in on Hannibal's left shoulder, his fingers instantly gripping onto the dress shirt. He could feel it crumpling in his tight grip and pull against Hannibal's back. While his other hand; now free from holding his keys, came around to rest on the man's waist. This seemed to send out a signal to Hannibal as he pulled Will closer into him, until they were flushed together. It had Will recall that old saying the chaperones at his high school dances would tell every teen couple they could to "leave room for Jesus." And how what he was now doing with Hannibal was beyond the term of sacrilege approaching blasphemy. The thought sent an odd pulse of pleasure through his veins, that Will blamed on growing up in the Bible belt of the country. That he was once more staring at a God, he was basically forced to worship as a child to the point of nearly despising and breaking another testament in its face. Not like he hadn't done that before several times before or even believed in the older more strict testaments that painted the God as a being to only fear and believe, made no rules for mistakes or acts of free will. Yet kissing Hannibal for some unknown reason felt like a gateway into partaking in an even bigger sin that did not involve any form of intimacy whatsoever. As if he continued down this prepared path there would be something more lurking in the shadows and Will felt himself not caring, that paranoid part of his mind no longer cried out to be listened to while he had the other's lips pressed against his. His hands on his body, holding him close in a way that he could not slip away.

Hannibal felt Will open more into their kiss, it was paired with a spark of exultation that traveled through his body. Will once more lowered his guard for him as he accepted the form

affection and was returning it as well. As he felt Will's hand find places on his person to hold as he leaned into the kiss. The way Will's hands clutched onto him as though he was reassuring him that he wasn't going to slip through his fingers like before. That he wasn't going to doubt his actions or read between the lines of texts that only existed into the paranoid mindset that loved to take control of his thoughts. No, not this time, this time he was going to stay planted on the spot and take Hannibal's offering of affection. An offering Hannibal began to want to make even more grandiose than a simple kiss, he found his more human side needing, craving more from the other. A part of him felt a tinge of shame for craving to that need, he wanted to think himself above the act of feeling arousal by the most basic act there could be. To let his heart begin to behave out of his control like it had started to do, as Hannibal felt this urge to seek more of Will's mouth out, besides the act of his lips touching his. But that was when it slithered into place, that he shouldn't try and fight off this growing feeling, because this wasn't just any person, he was gracious enough to let them have the privilege of feeling his lips upon theirs, this was Will Graham he was kissing. His Will, that sought out his lips first and when they once more came back to reenact their first meeting greeted them all over again, this time with strong desire. That revelation alone was enough to not only push aside that feeling of shame, but destroy it.

Especially when Will tilted his head ever so slightly so he both leaned into Hannibal's touch while also angling his head. While he began to open his mouth, inviting Hannibal to deepen their kiss, once again making the more brazen move, acting more on his own desire for Hannibal that also laid in the land of simple human affection. Letting even more of his guard to lower in this one act, that would literally let Hannibal slip in and he did so, moving closer; if that was even possible at this point, his tongue brushed across Will's bottom lip. Feeling the plush skin give slightly to the pressure lingering for only a few seconds, not enough to have Will's active paranoid mind act up; not while it still laid dormant, to begin to question Hannibal's movements. To begin to question if he was once again acting to forward in all of this which would no doubt lead Will down that foul path of feeling rejected all over again. So, before that could take place, Hannibal slipped his tongue into Will's mouth. A mouth that he had fed a countless number of victims to, that had tasted human flesh. Hannibal's tongue eagerly, yet mannered explored the other, as his tongue brushed against Will's.

Their lips now instead pressed together slotted together, Hannibal's hand left its anchored spot, on the other's side and snaked around and firmly planted itself in the curve of the small of his back. His fingers spread out to cover as much as possible, while he tried to predict what that flesh would feel free of the two layers of clothes. While his tongue began to trace every point and indent of teeth, teeth that not only an hour ago had bitten and chewed on pieces of a heart that Hannibal had carefully selected and hunted down for the other. The doctor let the points of those teeth dig into his tongue while also gliding across Will's, as he continued to explore more of Will's mouth. Still able to taste the lingering dark notes of freshly ground coffee that had not yet faded away and gave away to the natural taste of Will himself. Wanting nothing more than to taste every inch of Will for himself as he pulled Will's body closer, the heat from their bodies colliding together to create its own being, he could feel the pounding of their hearts coming together in their own rhythm. This all brought a dark spark to travel sharply through the doctor's body, a spark he had not felt before. It felt like pure lightning had scattered across his nerves and were racing to find an outlet to escape from. Lightning that was made when the weather was at its darkest turn and it made those who stood outside pray, they had taken shelter sooner. Crackling across dark clouds that

painted the sky in the night's aroura. Danger is what laid in its energy as it carved out through the sky, along with a powerful energy that could not be handled by itself. That energy was running wild through Hannibal's body sending sparks of pleasure that he could not find it in himself to fully control as he continued to taste Will.

While Hannibal was dealing with his revelation, Will was discovering his own. As he deepened their kiss and Hannibal followed his lead to do so, he felt it. That wet spark that haunted him for so long that only showed up when Hannibal laid his hands on him in his most opened times. Whether that was in a crowded art action or in his office by the door, that flicker returned. But unlike before that small flame had finally erupted inside his chest and cascaded outwards in furry of wisping flames and crackling heat. Traveling through every nerve point he had that dared to be over acting or underacting until they burned its blistering presence. Will could not stop his mind as it began to make the comparison to the last time, he felt something close to this sensation that over took his body, made by such an act. If kissing Miranda had birthed a delicate blossom made of soft warmth, kissing Hannibal created a wild fire that wanted nothing more than to cover every inch of him. Leaving nothing behind, but a scorching reminder of its touch as it flowed over every nerve, every vein, every tendon, not stopping until he was purged clean from all the thorns that still sat beneath his skin. Until it was the only sensation left lingering inside of him even long after they separated.

The idea helped push Will to more daring actions when it came to their kiss, no longer acting rigged and doing more than invite Hannibal to enter his mouth. He tried to ignore the way the man's tongue seemed to be tracing every available inch of him, as Will tried to replicate the man, by doing the same thing. A shiver of tight pleasure rippled through him as he took in how sharp and jagged some of the pristine man's teeth actually were and a thought trickled into his mind on how well those teeth could leave marks on his body. When he felt Hannibal's hand leave his side to move to his back, Will decided he too needed to move his hand from the man's shoulder and instead of going somewhere on his midsection or back, like Hannibal had done with his hand, Will reached higher. Holding the back of Hannibal's head, ruining the well-maintained look it held, burying his fingers in the soft short locks for the first time. Another small pulse escalated though him as he realized he was messing up the man's hair, causing it to become disarray all thanks to him, but what also had the pulse rippling through him was the feeling that the man's chest rumbled against him when he racked his fingers though Hannibal's hair. In order to pull him closer like how Hannibal had placed his hand on his back to do the same until the idea of them fusing together like two cells seemed possible. But when he did so, his fingers buried in soft locks pulling the man close, followed by that soft vibration radiating from the doctor's chest was when a thought entered his mind. *Did Hannibal Lecter just growl?* That idea sent its own odd primal hunger inside of him that began to expand throughout, not just his mind, but his body. It helped push all those jolts of pleasure and turn them towards one direction. Tricking like pulsing lave, a heat that would set off a chain reaction that could not be quelched until they both came together.

That's when another thought entered his mind. *Was this right?* Because a part of him was telling him that it was, there was clear attraction shared between the two and perhaps something more lingering under the dark water they wade in waiting to be discovered. But was he in the right state of mind to let those feeling reach the surface, to let him experience the burning wild fire that traveled though his body. Perhaps he was acting too fast in this

situation, not thinking quite as clearly as he would like. Perhaps his body wanted to take control while his mind wanted to just lay in a haze of building pleasure. Will felt a tug if discomfort pull at him with the idea, he couldn't do that not to Hannibal. He wouldn't be able to not only face the man, but himself as well if he just let this action continue and not be based on mutual attraction and a want to be together because it was something they both wanted. And not because this was the first act of affection given to him after Miranda and he was acting like a stray when given their first piece of meat in months and willing to roll over for the person giving them it. No, that didn't sit right for the empath.

Will for the second time broke their kiss and this time Hannibal had to hold everything inside of him that was cracking apart to not pull Will back to him. It would be so easy to do so, they were already so close together to the point of becoming one. But Hannibal held himself back and did not let the pang of disappointment show on his already slipping mask. He was already missing the taste of Will's mouth the feel of his teeth and the press of his lips against his, it was already forming into a memory he would tuck away to add on to their first kiss. A pile of memories had started to form and he would need to expand the space in his Mind Palace for when more would be added later. And he knew more would be added later, if the twitch in Will's pants didn't speak as loudly as it did against Hannibal's own groin; which did not help chase off the pleasure that he had felt only enhanced it. But Hannibal held himself together when he noticed that familiar look cross Will's features, the man was uncertain once more.

"I'm sorry," Will uttered through small pants, lips feeling raw and mind beginning to swim in an already building lustful haze that craved the other man. Will lowered his hand from Hannibal's hair so it could go back to rest on his shoulder, who felt scorching under his touch. Will hadn't expected the man's temperature to rise like it had, just from their kiss. Hannibal copied his movement and he dropped the hand that had rested on the side of Will's face so it could mirror Will's. Which caused a reaction to stir inside of him that wanted Hannibal to reinstate his previous touch, how quickly he felt himself missing that hand on the side of his face was almost jarring. *Almost*. "I just don't know what to, I don't want to come off as." Will tried to align his words, to make sense of the jumble mess that was his mind and heart. They wanted to be on the same page, but for some reason they kept skipping over a few words or just being one page over. It made no sense to him, because he wanted this, wanted more of Hannibal, but something was pulling him back and he wanted to break from whatever it was that was still clinging onto him. "I don't want you to misconstrue my reactions, to believe that I'm in this mind set where I'm desperate for another form of affection after Miranda." Will finally admitted.

And there is the rest of it, the rest of what has been haunting you and nearly had you fleeing into the night. Hannibal thought as he looked upon Will, his mind calming down from those electric waves of pleasure, from the aching hunger to have more, his person suit coming together for only the time needed, before it would be shed once more. *You are so quick to bare your neck and take the bite of whatever might lie ahead you no longer question it, quick to take the blame, to take the weight of any situation even if it does not call for it. A noble, yet foolish quality you hold, so unlike anything that lies with in me. Are you certain you are still fighting against this clear tie that has us connected or are you subconsciously walking towards it without it needing to be tugged.*

Hannibal took a noticed breath though his nose, exaggerating his movements in order to focus Will's mind back on his actual emotions and not what he perceived to be his emotions. Once more guiding the man back to the present and out of the rabbit hole he was falling through.

"Will, though your fear is understandable even warranted for some individuals who have been in the same predicament where wants and desires are muddled together in an unseeable haze that clouds their judgments. Where you begin to question your feelings and dare say morals during such an open act of passion. Something that the last time you experienced was laced in deceit and to suddenly face it once more where there is none, can seem like you are only acting with one portion of yourself. The part of you that hungers for what it once had that it knows is true." Hannibal began to explain and he could see that Will was ready to agree with him, that he was right in only thinking with his hormones and nothing else. The cannibal was not going to let that thought fester in the others mind for long, he was going to pluck it out like a nasty weed. "But let us agree that you are better than to think like that, to fool your mind and misconstrued what feelings you have nestled inside of you now with those of the past. To let the self-doubt cloud your judgment not only about yourself, but myself as well. Let me inform you Will, you have nothing to fear in the case of myself misinterpreting our actions. I know you better than that and I hope you know me better as well." Hannibal said as he lifted his hand and ran it through Will's hair, in a clear act of soothing and implanting reassurance. That, what was happening with them was being born form an attraction they both had felt from the beginning and now had decided to enter the word right when it was needed to be, to help finally cement themselves as a pair.

"To have faith that I can decipher when you are simply seeking out affection and acceptance out of a desperate need to heal and when you are simply realizing and accepting a part of you that has laid dormant for some time." Hannibal continued as he made sure to pull at Will's guilt complex to help the man over the hurdle that was keeping him at bay. His hand still slowly making its way through Will's curls, unlike Will when he had his hand tucked in Hannibal's hair who seemed to had a keen goal in making it disheveled and found an odd spark in it. Hannibal was simply in the mindset of trying to soothe the man while also strengthen their feelings they share. Making sure it did not die like a starving flame, but instead gave it small portions to make sure it did not fade away, but still existed while the two men figured out what the next step was to be done. Would it be Hannibal, to make another move, to take control of the situation even further, or perhaps Will might step back in and decide where they would go from here. "Either way I am more than a patient man and I will take that burden from you when you feel like you are no longer safe to hold the weight. I will be here to decipher every congealed thought or emotion that ravages you, plagues you. Because my feelings towards you are as real as the blood that pours from our veins."

"Then let's continue to decipher." Will spoke, his voice low with and airy as he felt a part of his mind that wanted to analyze every part of the older man finally begin to shut up. Tired of letting his mind flood with negative outcomes, trying to predict what will and won't happen if he decided to take the path that Hannibal was obviously pulling him through or not. Instead, he was going to fall back on how he acted in the kitchen and once again act on attraction and desire. Will pulled Hannibal roughly into another kiss, skipping over the tender, past the uncertainty and straight to that fire building heat that was their shared desire. Instead of stiffening up in shock like last time when Will surprised him with a kiss, Hannibal

acted just as quickly. Adapting to the sudden sensation of Will pressing his lips roughly to his once more and it was enough to send out that electric pulse through his body once more. Carving not just through his muscles, but into his bones as they traveled throughout him, leaving no inch of his body untouched from the pleasure they promised him if he was to continue. Soon enough that static like pleasure began to travel downwards, pooling in his lower stomach and it began to drip even lower until the feeling of blossoming arousal made itself clear to the doctor. It also had Hannibal questioning himself.

What more can you do to me? What else can you unravel if a simple kiss, nothing more than lips pressing together has my mask cracking and body no longer under control. Strictly tamed reactions now beginning to run on their own accord. Hannibal thought as the once gentle caress of Will's hair turned sharp when he moved his hand down to the back of his head and gripped those untamed curls that did nothing, but beg to be handled rough by his hand for the longest time they've known one another. The sudden stern grip had Will opening his mouth for Hannibal once more and the man took the moment with greed as he went back to exploring and savoring Will's mouth. Memorizing the feel of Will's tongue as it slid against his while Will's went to explore his own mouth. Feeling Will's tongue prod at his teeth as well, but unlike last time there was confidence in Will's exploration and with the thought that Will was becoming more confidant, had Hannibal stepping close to the edge. To the point he was close to falling to his knees and showing the man what true worshiping was, to erase the memory of what Miranda had done to him those months back in the bathroom. How Will's cock felt against his thigh, the cannibal was starting to lean into temptation. If he was feeling this much dosage of pleasure from simply sucking on the empath's tongue, what would he be gifted if he had Will's cock nestled on his tongue. That thought alone had his own beginning to strain against his slacks, throbbing in a building need for attention. *Do you realize the strain you are having on me my dear Will, years of restraint and training all coming undone by simple imagination and oral pleasure.* Hannibal's grip on Will's hair tightened at the thought and he felt the man's fingers digging into his shoulder, a clear warning that Hannibal was pushing it when it came to handling his hair. Hannibal eased his grip on the curls, not fully releasing them, but making it more comfortable for the man, showing he was listening when Will showed signs of discomfort. Showed he was there for Will as they continued down their path together as they explored and figured out what was going to happen next.

But that didn't exactly stop him from testing the waters while the two shared their embrace. His hand that had rested so long on Will's back began to move around back to the front. Gliding past his side and though it never left Will's body it did venture downward, scrapping down his hip and towards his thigh, nails scrapping against the rough fabric of his pants. Until Hannibal's hand found its wanted destination and that was the rather prominent bulge that was Will's stiff cock. Hannibal slowly pressed the flat of his thumb into strained flesh which caused Will to take in a sharp breath through his nose and clench even tighter on Hannibal's shoulder. It also had the empath push his hips forward into the pressure Hannibal was providing. Taking the pleasure that Hannibal was offering him, showing that he was no longer hesitant on what lied in wait for them and was simply in the moment of crooked intimacy that was soon going to be slightly straightened as Hannibal pressed ever so slightly. Even offering more to the man, by slowly stroking his thumb up along Will's clothed cock, moving the feeling of pleasure to give him something new yet familiar to feel. Giving Will that small spark of pleasure to feed off while the doctor still ravished his mouth. But it did not

stop there because soon Hannibal felt Will's hand that did not rest on his shoulder begin to do its own wondering.

Its destination was much higher up than Hannibal's, instead of mirroring the doctor, Hannibal felt Will's hand move over his midsection. A hot palm glided over his stomach and continued upwards until it rested on his chest for a few moments. Feeling the man's strong heartbeat before it began to venture further, clear Will was not satisfied with simple fabric and wanted to touch, to feel more of the man who was offering him pleasure through simple pressure. Will's fingers began to fiddle with the ivory-colored buttons of Hannibal's dress shirt, undoing one then two soon enough there was enough of an opening for Will to slip through. Able to reach the heated flesh the teased his palm, Will's hand slid past the fabric and rested squarely on Hannibal's broad chest. Where to Will's surprise he was met with the coarse texture of chest hair. He had assumed Hannibal would have been bare underneath his shirt, much like he was. The man was trimmed to the point, making it known how extensive his grooming habits were just by appearance alone, Will often found a humorous thought that liked to enter his mind when he often regarded Hannibal's style was of the man having a two-week appointment at some high-end barbershop to make sure his hair never grew past the desired length. To feel the probably well-maintained chest hair; Will wouldn't put it past the older man to have a routine for his body hair, he probably had special soap for it or something ridiculous like that in his bathroom, underneath his hand. It honestly had something else stirring around inside of him. The thought of wanting to see more of Hannibal's body to see what laid underneath the three pieces of eight-hundred-dollar suits with patterns only the good doctor himself could pull off. To take in Hannibal as a whole and not what the man presented to the world around him.

But Will did not decide to venture underneath Hannibal's shirt to simply feel his heartbeat, no, he wanted to give the man some stimuli as well. Both to share in the pleasure and to see how the man would react, Will's fingers moved from the center and towards Hannibal's right peck; which was slightly well defined making the need to see the man bare grow even more in Will, his fingers soon found what they wanted and Will lightly ran his nails over the man's nipple. Which caused yet another rumble to come from Hannibal's chest as Will gave sensitive body part some attention, feeling it perk as he lightly rubbed his fingers slowly around the nub, before right over it with his nails again, repeating the motion changing from clock wise to counter and in return Hannibal's pressure on his cock increased. Not enough to cause uncomfortable pain, but a type of discomfort that added to the arousal he had building inside of him. To the point Will found himself threatening to peak if the man kept up with his technique. Will had never thought of himself as someone who could climax with such little going on, simple stimulation from pressure and how they were basically devouring each other's mouths. Will always found that he needed more to get off of, more to stimulate, more to please, to even come close to anything. That was why he felt he could rely on his over active imagination when he was alone and in need of release, though those days were far and few in between; being surrounded by others gruesome demises and demanded to play killer after left him with no sexual need when he was alone. Will chalked it up to two reasons, tiredness from the long work day and disgust with what his mind could and would conjure up on its own if he dared to let go of the reins.

But when he focused on those rare sparks of need, he could push himself to that point of release, because when he could dip back to his imagination and times with others in the

bedroom. Where he had their feelings leaking into him, giving him a sort of overstimulation that reached a boundary that he himself could not touch when it was just himself, his hand and something mondain going on in his mind. But there he was questioning if that idea of himself was about to be proven wrong. With his own arousal and the dark sparks of Hannibal's own whispering into his conscious, as if it was another part of him ripping pieces of itself to gently hand feeding itself to Will. Making him gorge on both his own heat pumping feelings and Hannibal's until Will had no other choice, but to irrupt in a fountain of ecstasy.

As if the man could sense Will's need for him and the trouble, he found himself approaching the two pulled away from one another for the third time that night. But at least it was of their own accord to not break the tension with explanation, but to see where they now might be heading. Both still held their shared hold on one another, hands not daring to leave their spots on the warm bodies they clung to. Their breaths matched as they took one another's disheveled appearance in, both fighting the arousal that rolled through their bodies like ships on the tossing sea, trying not to get pulled down into the dark deadly waters that threatened to drown them. But they both knew, that neither one of them could fight those thunderous waves, as long as they held onto each other, taking in one another's aura, letting it caress them as they both realized they did not want to stay above water.

"Hannibal." Will's voice etched into the heated air they created as he looked more at the man's chest, as if he was slightly too embarrassed to look the man anywhere near his face. His grip on Hannibal tightened as he slowly removed his other hand from the man's shirt, already finding that he missed the skin on skin contact they shared. But as he slipped his hand free from the man's shirt, it was quickly caught by the wrist. This caused Will to pause for a moment as he wondered what Hannibal was about to do as he lifted his eyes to look at the man, to witness what might happen next. Will watched as Hannibal easily lifted his wrist up and towards his mouth and though his eyes lingered and Will's wrist. They immediately shot up, cutting towards Will's and easily seizing him right as Hannibal pressed his lips on the empath's captured wrist. Will noticed in those sharp dissecting eyes a dark lust that could no longer hide behind the man's control.

Hannibal easily felt Will's heartbeat quicken when his lips met the subtle pulse of the radial artery. Feeling it beat against his lips as they softly pressed down, it had that dark pulsing pleasure that radiated through his body grow. While he looked over at Will, seeing pupils that sit in the center of those captivating thundering storms dilate when witnessing an act that could be seen as simple, compared to what they had been doing. Up to this point, the fact that his action of kissing Will's wrist had caused the man to continue to react as though he had kissed any other part of him had Hannibal's mind conjuring up what others parts of Will he could simply kiss and have the man coming undone. He had to test the waters while still in this position.

Will watched as Hannibal moved from his wrist, the man's hot breath tickling his skin as he slowly made his way to the palm and when Will had thought the man would stop there he kept going. Until he reached his fingers and began to lay a gentle kiss on each tip. If his heart hadn't already left his chest it wanted to, every time he felt those sharp yet soft lips press against each of his fingers Will found his heart pound just as hard, until Hannibal reached his thumb, running out of digits to show affection to, so he moved his mouth to finally land in

the center of Will's palm. Where they stayed for the longest time, it all made Will's chest tighten, muscle constricting around bones as they felt as though they were slowly caving in. Something inside of him was bound to snap if things kept going how they were. Will felt himself growing taunt with this new form of lust he hadn't experienced before; it was raw and dark. It etched itself into his bones and spread through him in a way that was slightly concerning to him. Will had never felt this kind of attraction towards another being, not Alana, not Beverly and certainly not Miranda. It was close to being raw damn near animalistic the way his body began to ache for more than just simple kisses and provocative touches. It spread through his body like a poison that he found himself not needing the cure for.

"Hannibal." Will spoke once more this time his voice teetered on edge as though it was a warning to the man, that if he continued that all might fall apart right then and there. How Will's words rumbled out of him through nearly clenched teeth added to Hannibal's own arousal once more. He knew he was pushing the man to his limit, carefully feeding into Will's own arousal while Will also fed from his. He was escorting the man to a place where both their own chained beasts roared for freedom, pulling on chains until they were taunt. Close to nearly snapping from strains and they could pounce on one another. Where their teeth and claws could appreciate the flesh, they dug into in their wild frenzy of desire and longing. Hannibal could tell Will's beast was at that stage and that was what the cannibal wanted, Will no longer feared their path towards intimacy, no longer felt that undesired hesitancy. Now he craved it just the same, every inch of him hungered for Will in both the primal and spiritual way that nearly had him questioning his own survival. The risk he faced if were to become close to the agent likely to happen if they continued down this path. Yet at the moment Hannibal found himself pushing that weary to the side and letting the more prominent greedy nature he faced take capture of his mind and body. Hannibal had to inform himself this was a night of both reconnections and now new connection, he could not focus on the future he might or most definitely face, but the present he stood in.

Hannibal drew his lips away from Will's palm before he spoke. "I believe our moment of exploration might be well best situated in more comfortable location." He spoke as he adjusted his grip so he held Will's hand. Their fingers interlocking perfectly and palms pressed together, it already had Hannibal imagining more scenarios where they could hold their hands. Sitting in the study at night, a warm fire burning, the sound of its life mixed with soft classical music as they sit in opposite chairs, both preoccupied in their own tasks to help them unwind after a long day. Once in a while just to show that he was still present and unable to go another moment without some form of affection not shared in the moment Hannibal would lift Will's hand to his lips and kiss each and every knuckle; one just as important as the last. Or perhaps walking down the crowded sidewalks of Florance, where he would direct Will attention to the many of its incredible architecture and reveal the history that laid behind such deep designs. Along with showing him the very stomping grounds where he had become a man for the first time and showed a part of the world the monster that it had given birth too. The blood he had spilt and bathed in as he grew to sculpt his own self, a statue sculpted by its own hands and left to only be viewed by eyes he himself felt valued him in ways they never could grasp unless he allowed it. But there Hannibal found himself once again jumping ahead in the future with the empath he held hands with.

“But I would like to inform you, that you do not have to take in my invention,” Hannibal continued as he ran his thumb over Will’s knuckles. “I know this might seem slightly sudden, but we are both adults and we both understand the attraction we feel for one another. So do forgive me if this seems forward to you.” Hannibal continued and Will could tell though the man was confident in his actions and in himself, he still wanted to cover basses that could seem hidden to Will. Openly discussing how it could seem rather rash for them to suddenly jump into bed with one another after just now bringing their attraction out in the open for one another. And Will understood where the man stood in the matter, probably trying not to bring out Will’s own flight instincts that have been acting up for the past months. But he soon noticed, he did not really care if this was rash, so sudden, that they did not pine after one another like most would call conventional. Did not go on a candle lit dinner or a few more dates where they tested the waters. That would make sense if what they had was conventional, but when was anything about them was ever conventional?

“I want to take an educated guess and say your bedroom resides on the second floor.” Will spoke, showing Hannibal that he was opened to the invitation and letting more of his confident side show, through the crack in the door that Hannibal helped open for him. “Of course, this is if that was the idyllic place you wanted to continue our exploration.”

“Your educated guess would be,” Hannibal lifted Will’s hand to his mouth and laid a heated kiss to his knuckles. “Correct.” He said as he lowered Will’s hand to give him a confidant smile with a dark gleam in his eyes. “Would it be fair to make my own assumption that this is your way of taking up my offer to continue this in the bedroom?” Will matched his smile and that was the only answer Hannibal needed as he began to lead Will towards his bedroom. A room that never crossed his mind when he listed his favorite locations in his home, but after tonight it would soon become his favorite, if that ment knocking his kitchen to third and his dining room to forth then so be it. It only proved to the cannibal the type of pull Will unknowingly had on him. He did his best to hide the childish feeling of eagerness that over took his body, causing his heart to quicken and the need to grip tighter on to Will’s hand as he continued to lead Will to the upper part of his home, a part Will had never been to, now that he thought about it.

The agent mainly stuck to the lower part of Hannibal’s residence whenever he came over. In fact, now that Hannibal thought more in depth about it, Will only ever been in three places of his home, the dining room, the entry, and the kitchen. He never stayed long enough to end the night in the living room or the study and now Will was already being taken to the master bedroom. Hannibal had to control the satisfied smirk that played at his lips; the only reason it was not hidden was mainly because Will was behind him, as he thought about the possible jealousy that might form in others mind if they could know the fact the he was taking Will to bed. The fleeting memory that never really needed to linger in his mind began to conjure itself as he began to sink into even more of the idea of jealousy forming in others. Yet that was not the sole focus in his mind as he walked Will up his stairs taking the steps with none of the eagerness that rattled the bars of its cage inside of him as he felt the moment slowly build up. Growing higher and higher with each step they took the soon to be climax of their travels would be threatening to crumble underneath its pulsating girth, neither saying a word between them as they walked up the narrow staircase, hands laced together in hold that seared both their palms. No, the fleeting thought had merely helped increase his already rocketing lust for the man, the idea that others would seethe with some form of resentment in

the dark beauty they were about to create together in the heat of building attraction and finally locating their better half. The idea of those bitter thoughts and stares of longing it was them in either one of the twos grasps helped enhance that already pounding moment as they continued down the hall, building anticipation echoed down the hall like a well practice thumping of a drum until both arrived to their sought-out destination, the master bedroom.

Will never envisioned Hannibal's bedroom, that was something that never crossed his mind when he would pounder about the acentric doctor. Will found himself pondering about the man's living room, home study and backyard, but never the man's bedroom. That was a place in Hannibal's home that Will could not bring his mind to step foot in. As he would walk the property in his mind, taking in details he both seen and filled in the blanks of and when it came to the room where guards could be lowered, where someone could be seen at their most vulnerable. Because of the private atmosphere created while growing up, when the bedroom for a child was the only place in their parents' house that could be seen as theirs. Where they could go to be surrounded by objects that reflected them and only them. As they grew the room changed with them until finally the child could leave the house they grew up in, leaving the room that sheltered them the most and continued to expand in a space that was truly theirs in the end. Yet the bedroom still held the most of who they were, though the house could hold aspects of the person who nested in it, the bedroom would contain the rawness that was owner. That was what always seemed to stop Will when he would walk up to the bedroom door in his mind, the idea that he would be over stepping some part of Hannibal, even if it was all imaginary, it still felt like intrusion, overstepping a boundary he was sure the doctor would not bother to show the same respect to if roles were reversed. Yet Will would, because he did not want to face whatever laid on the other side of the imaginary door, whether it be tales of childhood that Hannibal kept locked and then buried in the back of his mind not ment to see or even touch the light of day. To something simple like a dirt secret that he would take to the grave or only admit to when heavily intoxicated, whatever the reason Will always found himself turning away from the door in favor of exploring other spots of the mind-built house.

But as he stepped into the actual room itself, he felt as though he was stepping inside of a cave. Even though he heard the sound of Hannibal flicking on the light switch and watched as a few of the lights came to life, giving off a cold white light that seeped through the cream color square shades. The room still consumed the added light with dark colors that absorbed instead of casting, walls with slight lighter trims that would help cage the room, making it both feel small and large at the same time, to the blue ceiling that Will could not name the shade of that matched the furniture; perhaps a dark shade of teal. That cut up to the ceiling at a sharp angle. The room felt like Hannibal, but at the same time it did not, though it held aspects of the man that were personal it also held parts that were placed inside not for comfort. Though there were two leather chairs sitting in front of the clean-cut fire place, the room did not feel welcoming towards visitators. It was merely designed to, an illusion, to bring a comfort to those Hannibal did bring up to the bedroom to make them feel like the man was as opened to them as he led the public eye to believe.

But in reality, the room was only ment for him and no one else and so he but two chairs in the center to help with filling in space and bring cemetery and add to the social enigma he portrayed himself as in front of others. To remind him that though he felt comfort in being alone in his own solitude, he still had an image to hold up even when alone. Instead of

focusing on the objects ment to cast the man in a light he preferred everyone to view him in. Will's eyes traveled to parts that he knew were glimpses of the real man that wore the three-piece suits. The oak desk with a note book propped open; ready for its writer to return to it, next to two small photos of actual people and not the ones that framed around the bed. Put there for the aesthetic and perhaps some hidden meaning, but could be replaced if the man felt like it. On the desk also set a pair of hollowed out horns smaller to the ones in the dining room, Will had to give it to the doctor; he knew how to stick to some form of a theme. One Will still could not place, because every time he thought he had, he would discover something else. Because the more Will looked the more complex the room became. Though it held a simplistic feel, open floor space, there were objects in the room that felt like they belonged, but at the same time didn't. What seemed to belong the dark oak dresser on top of it a tray of crystal glasses ment to be used when Hannibal had company; to elevate the mood, and next to the glasses a bleached skull. That belonged to something in the feline family; a small mountain cat if Will had to guess. *Guess he really is a cat person*. Will inwardly commented with a slight humor as his eyes then different to something that stood out. *Is that samurai armor?*

Will shook the thought away, now wasn't the time to become lost in the sudden realization of the mixture of both Asian and European décor that spread around the room. Merging into one another with seamless ease if he took in the surrounding in as a whole and not just pick them apart like he had been doing. But again, now wasn't the time to get caught up in the décor of the both inviting and repelling room, because he felt Hannibal's hand give his, a subtle squeeze, coaxing him back into his surrounding as though the doctor had sense that Will's mind had begun to wonder around the new surroundings it had found himself in. Which helped in someways as his eyes went back to rest on Hannibal as they finished their journey into the bedroom stopping in front of the king size bed and the two chairs, fire place empty of life. But the fire that burned in the both of them made up the difference for the heat the fire place could provide.

Yet as Will stood in front of Hannibal, a nagging feeling began to form in the back of his head and it made its way through him as he realized there was a very important detail the two of them still had not yet discussed. And for some reason that idea made Will more nervous than he should actually be in the situation. Because he recognized the feeling and he didn't believe he would encounter it once again in his mid-thirties after all this time. Then again, Will never believed he would end up sleeping with his not therapist before either, but here he was in the man's bedroom heart pounding so hard in his chest that he swore he could feel the blood pumping through each vein in his body. Before the exploded when the familiar feeling of Hannibal's hand came up to once more, to cup the side of his face. His thumb gently caressing the top of his cheekbone, in a slow back and forth manner, that not only soothed the bubbling nerves that had still congealed inside of his mind, but add fuel to the raging fire that had not yet left his body.

"Everything alright Will?" Hannibal asked voice smooth and rich, with a hint of well Will wouldn't call it concern. Hannibal never showed concern, never let the emotion slip into his speech or stance, it made it a bit hard to place the tone in the man's voice when he spoke. But it was soft and delicate a tone if he had to place it in some category Will would say it laid on the odd plain of nurturing. But like most of the man's mannerisms it did not quit fit in the slot

all the way. It simply stood there existing among the rest without others noticing, if it looked like a duck, quacked like a duck, must be a duck.

Will placed his hand around Hannibal's wrist; how he wished his one heartbeat was as steady as the man's, holding it for a moment as he gathered his thoughts and tried to figure out the right words to chain together to create the sentence he needed. Will licked his lower lip, closed his eyes and took in a deep breath through his nose. *Just like a band-aid Graham you just need to rip it off and face the quick sting that will only last for a second. Hopefully.*

"I know this might not come as a surprise to you, but I still feel this need to inform you that this will be the first time I've ever been with a man." Will confessed, each word he spoke he felt his heart beat hard against his ribcage and the nerves inside of him twist into a ball of matted serpents. Will opened his eyes and once more he found himself trying to decipher the expression that Hannibal was giving him. An odd amalgamation of something soft and caring close to the expression Alana would give him that made him feel like she wasn't looking at him, but a kicked puppy that was in dire need of some TLC and then there was that something else. It was dark damn near twisted that wanted to break free from the softer image and destroy it. But all it could do was mix around inside of it like two different colors of paints that sat on opposite sides of the color wheel. Merging together and creating a color that was both beautiful and intimidating, making the artist weary of ever using it in their creation. That was when the idea of a label for this dark look clicked in Will's mind. *Hunger.*

And the deity that once tortured me for months have bestowed me another gift to make up for the wickedness, they thrown upon me for no reason. Are you looking for forgiveness, perhaps call back the sheep that had left your flock, not wanting it to leave the altar where the rest lay their heads, with their necks stretched out. Waiting for the sharped pendulum to come and slice their heads. Sad to inform you though, that though the offering is far greater than I expected, the sheep that has left your side was merely a wolf, no longer with the wool pulled tight over its eyes.

"My dearest Will," Hannibal spoke, voice reassuring as he raised his other hand to rest on the other side of Will's face, fully holding the man in his hands. Even if he spoke with a calming presence inside his chest that beast that had fought against its leash through the whole night, was soon reaching its intended goal very soon. Hannibal was honestly surprised with the restraint he faced after being given such a gift. Not listening to animal that snapped its jaws and emitted a low thunderous growl. Needing to take Will right then and there, to simply push him back onto the bed and ravish every inch of the profiler's body. Until both are too sore and exhausted to move. "Though your assumptions are correct, I am not taken back by your confession," Hannibal began to mirror his action of caressing Will's check with his other hand. To make sure everything stayed in a way that would not have Will closing in on himself or finding he was inadequate when it finally came to them not only connecting their minds, but bodies together. "But I must reassure you that we can and will take things as slow as you are comfortable with," he applied some pressure to help drive his reassurance home for Will. "If at any point you feel uncomfortable and no longer want to partake in the act we will stop and I won't hold any negative thoughts or feelings." Hannibal finished his voice had lowered throughout his sentence, dropping to a near state of velvet that when the air brushed against Will's skin, Will could have sworn he felt goosebumps form on his skin and hairs stand on edge.

“I guess this is your way of telling me that this isn’t exactly your first time to the rodeo, huh?” Will asked with a reserved smile as he took both of Hannibal’s wrist, not to pull them away, but to simply hold them in his grasp. Though a part of him cringed at the observation that came from his mouth, not exactly easy to bring up a topic like that for him. Again, something he blamed on his roots, growing up where someone would spit on you just for having your hair a length, they deemed not suitable for your gender and also ready to throw insulting names your ways laced with so much distain they might as well have left actually wounds. It wasn’t exactly easy for Will to fight the sort of knot that wanted to form in his chest, though he wouldn’t deny the attraction he felt for Hannibal, it helped push that long ago involuntarily sown in knot that only seemed to affect him. Because up to this point Will had seen himself as opened minded to the world that he walked in, not really batting an eye at how people presented themselves. He honestly never cared when he thought about, it didn’t harm him in anyway, he accepted the fact that people were people. They were attracted to who they were attracted to, as long as it was consensual and didn’t step over the obvious line of right and clearly wrong, Will did not care. But then again up to this point Will had thought he was straight. So, what did he exactly know about himself after all. Perhaps the knot he felt Hannibal could help rip it out of him and toss it into a burning fire and they could watch it become ash together. Will found himself enjoying that image to a point he felt another small jolt of pleasure drip down his spine.

Hannibal let out an amused chuckle at Will’s question. “My dear Will, I am nearly fifty years old and I make it known that I do not find myself bothered with the restraightens that society tries to put on gender roles. In result I have dabbled among the world of flesh in ways that many would frown upon.”

“A simple yes would have sufficed.”

“True.” Hannibal responded with a soft humorous smile, that showed a glimpse of the amusement he felt. The way the corners of his eyes crinkled and a small gleam in his eyes, it spoke of a soft nearly dead playful side of the man that rarely seen the light of day. It almost reminded Will of that smile Hannibal had given him the first day they met, after the verbal lashing Will inflicted upon him and then to make a return their first breakfast together. “But that would have taken away from the reassurance I wanted to bestow upon you in this most vulnerable state we are facing.” He added and once again Will could practically see the peacock feathers wanting to catch the cool lights of the bedroom. It caused the man to fight his own chuckle that wanted to flutter out of his chest, while his eyes and head went to look at the floor for a moment looking at their feet and how they were only inches apart, before he went back to look at Hannibal.

“Guess you have somewhat of a point.” Will said with little admission, to giving Hannibal the full win. Still a part of him wished that the man would sometimes be simple, but the other part enjoyed the little puzzle Hannibal set up when it came to their conversations. Giving Will’s mind the much-needed nourishment that it craved on an intellectual level that was hardly ever touched. Sometimes it was be scratched, teased, but never fully satisfied that was until Hannibal Lecter. The man could match his sharp tongue and way with illusions mad of words made to decipher by others, he kept up with Will and in return Will found himself engaging with the man; to show he too could keep pace with Hannibal, just as he had showed him. It was both refreshing and insufferable, both tangled in mind games that neither could

explain what the end goal was, was to get one over on the other? Perhaps or was it to become on equal footing, so like now they stood inches apart both in need of one another? Will didn't know and for once he did not find himself searching for the answers.

"Now, what do you say we continue our quest to experience each other in this new and raw state we find ourself inching towards?" Hannibal spoke once more dragging Will out of his mind and into the world the surrounded him. "Giving each other pleasures both familiar and foreign, I'll take the lead and make sure every moment is one you will not be able to or want to forget." The way Hannibal spoke the last part it sounded both like a sultry promise and a rough threat, clawing into Will's skin and making a shudder travel down the empath's spine. Because he knew Hannibal spoke of the truth and it made him ache to experience what the doctor offered him. To the point Will questioned how he was able to hold back as much as he had without pouncing on the man, pinning him to the bed and straddling those hips like a cowboy on a bucking bronco.

"Then I believe if we are to proceed," Will reached out and began to unbutton the still remaining buttons on Hannibal's shirt. "We need to get rid of these layers." He said with a sly confident grin as he watched as his fingers made work of Hannibal's buttons, slowing revealing more and more of the man's body to him. Help build the arousal that burned in the pit of his stomach and spread though his body in a heated glow that wanted to consume all of him at once. While Will focused on the button's he didn't notice the intrigued look that captured Hannibal's face, the cannibal once more finding enjoyment in Will's more bold behavior when it came to the two

"I believe you are correct," Hannibal spoke as his hands left Will's face and when to run his fingers over Will's shoulders, lightly tracing the rough material under his fingertips, though apart of him would be more than delighted to view Will's body no longer having to rely on his imagination and small medical reports he had dug up in the past. That only helped paint a small portion of an idea of what Will would look like if he wore nothing in front of. The small sleep shirt and boxer briefs he managed to blessed with the one morning that would cement them together had pushed the curiosity for him back then and now he was soon going to no longer rely on his imagination. "Though I have to confess I am going to miss seeing you draped in my sweater." Hannibal spoke as he slowly began to push on Will's jacket, gently forcing it off the man's shoulder and Will lowered his arms for Hannibal to continue as he guided the jacket off the other. Not wasting his attention to watch as the piece of clothing fell from Will and landed on the floor with a noticeable weight.

"I think you just like the idea of me wearing something that, one isn't covered in dog fur and two costs over fifty dollars." Will said with an amused tone as he raised his hands back up to run his hands over Hannibal's shoulder, feeling the now loose fabric follow his palms as he eased the shirt off of the man. Watching as the white fabric left the man behind in favor of joining Will's jacket on the floor, but unlike his coat, the shirt fell with far less weight to the point it seemed the only thing causing it to fall was the buttons. Leaving its owner barren for Will's eyes and his eyes took in the sight with a form of greed that fed the lust that grew in him, helping it expand. Seeing the man's broad shoulders not being adorn with a sharp suit or his midsection a vest was almost impossible to comprehend. The man was physically fit in a way that made somewhat sense; Will did recall Hannibal mention that he often found himself swimming a few laps at a private pool that he also offered to invite Will to. Pointing out the

exorcise would both be beneficial for the mind and body. But Will didn't expect that simple swimming would give such a strong appearance, the man was no body builder, he wasn't exactly baring a six pack, stomach just as soft as Will's own and the empath found himself enjoying that idea of Hannibal not being built on muscles, but a healthy in-between, keeping word to how he did view his body as a temple, but a temple that lived in the present and was not altered to fit a world that only viewed an odd sense of perfection. The temple knew what was healthy for it and it found itself time to indulged even in things that could be seen as below it. The muscles that did show on Hannibal were healthier in a renowned way, especially in his chest, that was correct was adorn with well-maintained chest hair. Confirming Will's suspicion about the man definitely having a hair routine just for his chest alone.

Hannibal found himself biting his tongue to hold in a comment when he noticed how Will was taking in his upper body, the need to preen; to subtly suck in some air through his nose to expand his chest, bubbled under his skin. Knowing for once Will was the one taking in his figure and not the other way around, feeding into that part of him that sought out others eyes for attention, to be seen by those he seen as below him and now he could feel that part of him increasingly becoming full with the fact that Will; a man who held the potential to not only be seen as Hannibal's equal, but perhaps even higher than him. That helped push Hannibal out of his own self-centered thoughts and back toward the man in front of him, who still wore one more layer too much to Hannibal's desire.

"Perhaps it's a combination of both." Hannibal spoke, though he knew his words were no doubt falling on potentially deaf ears, by how Will's eyes seemed to continuing looking at his physique. As he reached forward and took the hem of his sweater; though he was tempted to just gift it to the man later on, and began to roll it upward. Slowly revealing the skin that drove him partly mad from the moment it teased him in Will's kitchen when the other had reached for a simple mug. Soon it will all be showing for Hannibal's staved eyes and craving fingertips; all will be his.

Will began to lift his arms without any instructions to do, easing the removal of the sweater in as a whole and Hannibal had found himself standing in the same boat Will had been in moments prior. Mind captured by Will's upper half now fully exposed for him. Instead of letting the sweater fall to the ground, Hannibal kept it clutched in his hands, it was the only thing he could do to stop himself from taking Will right then and there as he gazed upon the man. He was not surprised to see that like himself Will had also managed to keep himself in shape through taking care of his dogs, working on his boat and other projects that helped kept him active making up for his more stationary work as a professor. Will found his way to rid his body of energy and his body showed it. With subtle muscles in his arms that had Hannibal's mind conjuring how strong Will's grip was and how that grip might feel one day round his throat. Slowly cutting off his air supply the more Will added pressure. Slowly forcing Hannibal's lungs to crave the desperation of air that laid outside his reach. The mental image made the arousal he had been battling since they were down stairs escalate to a dangerous peek as he felt his own cock once more begin to grow hard. Hannibal refocused his mind back on taking in the rest of Will like his chest, which surprisingly lacked nearly any hair, except for the sparce fine hair around the man's nipples and the small trail below his navel. Everything else was pure skin and Hannibal would have been sure that Will like himself would at least have something more, if he was to go off Will's more rugged

appearance. With the neatly trimmed beard and curls that begged to grow past his ears, but were never allowed to become any longer than covering the tips. Often drawing Hannibal's mind to the possibility of Will letting his hair grow any further and letting those wild curls fully take control.

Unlike Will, Hannibal did not resist the call to touch, to trace as he let go of the sweater and though it pained him to let the article fall to the floor instead of it being properly folded, something greater overcame that small pain. Hannibal reached out and with delicate fingertips, slowly ran them over the heated flesh. Feeling Will suppress a shiver as he did so, Will skin was surprisingly soft to the touch, a grave contrast to the man's hands which were callused from hard work, his chest was as if Will never even touch a wrench before. The more Hannibal touched the velvet flesh, feeling muscle and bones the more the need to mark Will with bites grew deep and dark in him. His teeth ached to feel the flesh give under their pressure and tongue demanded a taste of it. All while Will stood perfectly still; Hannibal's own statue of David, as he continued to explore Will's chest and midsection with a feather light touch. Causing goosebumps to form in their wake as they ran over the sternum and down towards his abdomen. Hannibal's other hand came to join its brother as his left hand moved down his right moved upward. Touching Will's side, feeling the soft plain of external oblique, where there was an even balance of fat and muscle. Before being met with hard structure of Will's ribs followed by the rhythmical bumps as he continued his trace. Just as one hand felt the hardness of Will's bones, there other met the finally met the hem of Will's pants cutting Hannibal off from exploring any further, his eyes traveled up to look at Will and was greeted with the same shared look, it spoke of a question of rather or not they should proceed in all this. That they did not need to continue, they could stop here and simply spend the rest of the night exploring this one aspect of one another.

But the answer that lied in wait was the approval, a silent affirmation that Will did not speak, telling Hannibal that he was still very much present in the moment and he was not going to withdraw. Hannibal lowered his other hand that rested right on Will's fourth and fifth rib to join the one that lingered on Will's belt buckle and without breaking their softly held eye contact unclasped the worn leather and Will tried not focus on how his heart beat pounded against his chest when the leather loosened around his waist. Feeling the phantom touch of those hands on his body slowly fade away and begin to miss the way Hannibal seemed to appreciate just a simple part of his body, it made him aware of his own body and how still he had become while the doctor was touching him. Will broke their shared eye contact to watch Hannibal's fingers as they moved from the now undone belt to make work of the button and soon those long fingers gripped the zipper. Only to suddenly stop and Will felt the nails of confusion picking at his mind as he looked up at Hannibal with a questioning gaze. To be met with an artful gaze, that told Will that the man had something planned that wouldn't be as mondain as taking off his pants like Will had thought. Instead, Hannibal moved his hands to Will's waist and began to guide him until his back was facing the bed. Legs pressing against the high-end ottoman and Will found himself wondering what idea was working its way through the man's mind.

"Would you kindly have a seat." Hannibal spoke with a nearly invisible smile, only known by those distinct crinkles in the corner of his eyes and Will found himself caught off guard by the sudden question. Blinking heavily a few times trying to register soft command.

“Sure.” Will responded with a reserved tone as he slowly sat down on the ottoman, feeling the stiff cushion hold all his weight, barely sinking at all. Making it known that though it was ment for people to rest themselves on top of it, it was never used it that fashion. If Will had to guess Hannibal more than likely bought it for the aesthetic and that, was it. Once Will was seated, he looked up at Hannibal, waiting to see what the man had planned next, while also trying to ignore the pleased expression that graced those sharped features of his.

“Now, I believe the best path to take in order to move forward from here is for you to take off your shoes and then relax on the bed. Laying on your back.” Hannibal explained as if that would answer all of Will’s wondering questions that only found a fraction of satisfaction from the small dosage of instructions. Insurrections, Will found himself following without hesitation, untying each shoe, before sliding them off, along with his socks and tucking them to the side. Will tried to bury the heaviness of awkwardness that sat in his chest like a burning stone, searing his muscles to the point they did not want to move and just burn in the embarrassing heat as he moved backwards onto the large bed. Unlike the ottoman the bed gave way with easy submission to the mere weight of Wiil’s hands and for the second time Will found himself placing the chore of replacing his mattress at home with something more high-end. While the soft bed spread let itself be compromised, no longer able to holds its pristine condition while Will scooted himself a crossed it. He tied his best to not let his pants scrap too harshly against the no doubt expensive cover while he made his to the head of the bed. Only to stop when he felt the cool dark oak of the headboard greet the top of his back and his lower back was greeted by the large pillows. When he could not move himself any further back, all that was left was to look back at Hannibal, who once again was giving him one of those smiles that made Will think of the saying “the cat that the caught the canary.” The man looked too pleased in watching Will follow simple directions and it both formed an odd warmth in the pit of his stomach while at the same time made the hair on the back of his neck bristle.

“Thank you.” Was all Hannibal said before he turned his attention; reluctantly, away from Will. Though he wanted to spend just a few more moments staring at the empath. Taking in how pleasing he looked resting in his bed, surrounded by his blankets and pillows, skin absorbing more of his scent to the point a new form of jalousie wanted to form focusing on all of his belongings that had the opportunity to touch and caress some part of Will that he could not at the moment. Hannibal turned his attention away from the man, before he found himself pouncing on top of him and showing Will how he could ravish his body in an animalistic fashion that would leave him bedridden. Instead of falling into the animalistic need that coursed through his body like a spring heat. Easy to ignore, but once you realized the effect it had it was hard to distract yourself from anything else.

Will watched as Hannibal focused his attention to taking off his own shoes and pants. For a moment he felt a small sense of relief to not have those calculating eyes that could go from sharp to soft in mere seconds on him any longer. It only made Will that much more aware of his surroundings and how his body acted, though he kept reminding himself that he was a grown man in his thirties, he suddenly felt like he was seventeen again. In the back of his dates pick up trying to ignore how the scratchy blanket agitated his skin and focus more on keeping her pleased. Making sure he wasn’t all limbs and actually had some idea on what to do that wouldn’t turn her off and make her uncomfortable with him. While ignoring the idea that his first time was going to be in the bed of a dented up rusty pick up that he was

surprised could start up in one go. Out in the open while the summer air wasn't the only thing causing their bodies to grow hot and sweaty. Young Will would have never imagined his first time would have been like that, a night that was ment to be nothing, but star gazing; because the town he found himself stuck in really did not have anything else going for it, would turn into two teenagers falling victim to their still out of control hormones and at the time the perfect setting. Out in the middle of nowhere, where no adults could spot them, the soft sound of crickets chirping in the distance and the millions of stars lighting up the endless sky. Bodies lying close together where contact was unavoidable unless one of them made the move to scoot away; which neither one did, as they filled in the silence with nonsense. Before they knew it, one of them made a move; Will could never remember who, and they were experience things that they only knew of from talk and forms of media.

Will shifted himself back into the present as he reminded himself that he wasn't that lanky teen anymore and a full-grown adult as he watched while Hannibal began to take off his pants. With ease as he undid his buttons and then slowly pulled down his zipper and that was when Will realized what Hannibal was doing, he was preening, instead of hiding it like those multiple times before. Hannibal was not going to hold himself back as he knew Will was watching him, his body still in need of Hannibal's left on the bed waiting to see what the doctor was going to do next. This was another stage for Hannibal to take up, another performance that he wanted to make sure all attention was on him and him alone, dragging it out as long as humanly possible. Will wanted to feel some form of agitation towards the idea that Hannibal was showing off in some form, but he couldn't bring himself to feel such a negative emotion, because he expected nothing less and that sparked soft amusement in him along with that telltale flutter that liked to rear its unexpected head.

As if he was preparing himself to get use to the idea that this was going to be like in the future with the older man. Him finding small subtle ways to show off, before letting it all out in the open for Will to take in, no longer trying to be modest in his attention seeking nature. With that thought in his mind Will focused himself to watch Hannibal's show, as he began to slide his expensive slacks down over strong looking thighs; a reminder that Hannibal did in fact have muscles and flesh under his eye distracting suits, before revealing a pair of surprisingly tight looking black probably satin boxers. That clung to him like a second skin and left nothing to imagination with what they held behind them. And this caused a heavy thump to drop in Will's chest and a lump wanting to form.

Without hesitation; Hannibal hardly ever acted with hesitation, the man took off his boxes and Will really did not know how to react to viewing Hannibal's cock. It was a penis, he really didn't know how eles he was supposed to react to seeing one, if someone else was in his situation they probably believe the doctor was blessed with it. It was well in size, larger than his own and Will viewed his as average, Hannibal like in height had a few inches on him along with girth as well. The way it laid between his muscular thighs, the dark bulbus glistening tip peeking out from his foreskin that was slowly pulling back from the still forming erection. Will had to remove his eyes from staring to long at the body part eyes moving more towards the man's pubic region, again Will was surprised by the fact Hannibal actually had hair in an area he would have bet he wouldn't.

"Now, I believe the next course of action," Hannibal spoke drawing Will's attention and the empath watched as Hannibal walked over to the bed. Easily maneuvered over the ottoman

and began to crawl on top of Will. Approaching with ease and Will watched as Hannibal's muscles flexed under his skin, pulling tight with each out stretched motion. The older man's movements and how dark his eyes looked especially how Hannibal's bangs fanned out over his forehead, adding a deep shadow. It reminded Will of a powerful jungle cat, the way it would slowly prowl towards its unsuspecting prey. Body lowered as far as limbs would allow it, ears pulled back to lay on the top of its head, and eyes sharp and calculating. Then there was the way the bed dipped under the man's added weight, how his cock lightly swayed between powerful thighs as Hannibal approached him. The hard dramatic thump Will's heart made only moments prior picked up and turned into quick beats. Gathering speed all while Hannibal grew closer and closer until he was right on top of him, their bare chests so close, Will could feel the heat coming off of the man as he caged him onto the bed.

It also made Will aware that while Hannibal had crawled over him, he had inched himself down the bed, until he felt his back pressing into the mattress and his head nestled in the very comfortable pillow. "Is to make sure you and your body are in a state free of tension." Hannibal continued as he reached out and held the side of Will's head, causing Will to subconsciously lean into the touch, eyes fluttering slightly as he felt how Hannibal's thumb began to lightly caress his cheek. "Where you are at ease and it will be less jarring when we finally connect our bodies." Hannibal's voice dropped in level when he finished his sentence before he slowly dropped his hand, moved his body and began to lay delicate kisses across Will's jaw. Those light touches of his lips interacted with small scrapes of teeth as Hannibal made his way down towards Will's neck. Where the tip of his tongue introduced itself to the mix of lips and teeth. It had Will's breath picking up and he could feel a high from those kisses alone, his body already forming a crave for them.

Hannibal felt Will's arms slowly snake around his caging limbs to caress his back. Fingers lightly tracing over plain of flesh, still uncertain what to do in this situation as the younger man tried to figure out what he would want, what touch he craved from the empath. Hannibal knew that was how Will operated himself, wanting to give to his partner before taking his own needs of pleasure. Right now, that was what Will was focusing his mind on, trying to please Hannibal and it made the doctor feel both a wicked sense of greed, knowing that Will was going to try his best to make sure he felt satisfied. But it also made Hannibal feel challenged, he was supposed to make Will feel pleasure unbeknownst him, give him an experience he will never forget and would be cursed to think of whenever he dared to attempt to rid his mind and body with an experience that sadly would never hold a candles light towards what they are about to create together. Hannibal continued to kiss down Will's neck, decorating the skin with presses of his lips, nips of teeth and small licks using just the tip of his tongue. Enough to break up the pattern he found himself creating. Hannibal found himself holding back the urge to bite into the tantalizing thumping of the man's jugular vein when he felt it calling out to him while his lips danced over it. Because he knew that once he felt his teeth sink into the life-giving vein, who could not stop himself until his teeth sunk through Will's skin, piercing not only the flesh, but the jugular.

To then be gifted with the pungent copper taste of blood that would flood his mouth just as God flooded the earth. Coating both his tongue and body, while Will at first would struggle to break free, those hesitant touches turning harsh as he fought back, hips bucking, legs kicking while he struggled in not only Hannibal's hold, but the effect of sudden blood loss. Before falling still and giving in to the cold hand of death that reach out for him. To feel Will's pulse,

grow weak and fight leave him all while Hannibal had his teeth sunk into him, it was so very tantalizing, to the point it made his body hurt. Because if he fell into his dark urge, it would mean the crumbling end to the life he was living, to have Will go missing and to create a lie that would keep not only Uncle Jack at bay, but all those others who fell into dear Will's orbit. All ending with himself having to slowly remove himself, before everything came undone around him. It would also mean he would be ridding himself of the only person who not only could understand him, but rid himself off all the possibilities he held while in this new position. The wonders that not only awaited him, but Will himself, wonders that he could give and take away from the empath. To lose that, would be like losing his ability to taste, to feel, to see. The world would become so drastically dull that Hannibal knew he could never cope with.

As he maneuvered his mouth down Will's throat; away from dark temptation, Hannibal's hands also moved down Will's side. Reintroducing his touch as his flat palms slid over the bumps of ribs, feeling how Will's chest expanded under his lips, pressing itself to Hannibal's lips with every stuttering breath that Will took in. Until he met the loose waste band of his pants and caught the rough fabric with ease and began to pull them down with his body movements. And Will raised his hips to help Hannibal with his goal, as his lips ment Will's chest, the man's pants past over those teasing mounds of flesh that loved to tease the cannibal in the most innocent of ways. Soon those pants met just as strong thighs and before either one recognized the progress Will managed to help kick his pants off. Leaving him in his boxer briefs, still far more clothed than the man on top of him. The bluish grey fabric hid the very prominent bulged beneath it, in need of Hannibal's attention. The doctor made it to Will's navel, before pulling his lips away and glancing down at the mound that grew from Will's briefs, before his eyes flickered up to meet Will's, who stared at him in a mixture of curiosity and need. His breath slowly labored, just from Hannibal's attention. Soon though those eyes widen when Hannibal leaned down and nuzzled his face against Will's clothed erection. Taking in the natural musk that came off the groin in heated air and the aroma was the most natural scent of the empath Hannibal would ever experience. Not so pungent that it hurt, it was firm, but not over powering a mixture of hormones that Hannibal had made the man release. The thought made his own cock swell ever so slightly more as he continued to press his mouth against the cloth, making sure it wasn't just Will's pre-ejaculation to dampen the material. The sound that Will made when he first pressed his opened mouth to the man's clothed cock and the tensive breath also helped. How Will responded with a small sharp suck of air and barely there arch in his back, drove Hannibal further. His hand came up to hold Will's side, as he continued to open mouth kiss the bulge, giving Will an idea what was to come next. Only when Hannibal felt he had given it enough soft attention did he pull away.

Hannibal flashed his eyes up to gather Will's state of mind and body, the man had not yet made any sound of distress, Hannibal only wanted to make sure that Will did not lose his voice in what had just accrued. Though in Hannibal's mind nothing really did happen enough to make the man go completely speechless. What he seen when he looked up, was the change in Will's skin tone, a soft red was beginning to color pale flesh. Starting from the chest and blossoming upward infecting his neck and ever so slowly his face. Hannibal once again ripped his eyes away from the sight before him and turned his attention back to where Will needed it and slowly leaned down to capture the waistband of Will's boxer briefs with his teeth. Before pulling them down to soon join the pants that hid them, the way Will's breath began to pick up pushed him to continued. Slowly using his teeth to pull the boxer briefs

down, freeing Will's cock and earning Hannibal another breath from the man before fully freeing Will from his confines. Hannibal looking down at Will's now free cock, taking in its appeasing length and slimness as it laid stiffen near the man's strong thighs, its dark pink tip already seeping and Hannibal could already envision the weight in his mouth.

"I always believed the best way to ease tension in the body, is oral stimulation." Hannibal spoke as he looked over at Will with a small glint in his dark eyes, before turning his attention back to Will's cock, moving the man's thighs apart to give him room as he took hold of stiff appendage. Grasping it lightly in his hand, applying subtle pressure

"Hannibal, wait." Hannibal, stopped in his tracks and looked up at Will, though his outer appearance showed confusion, he knew where the man was going. Will licked his kissed raw lips. "You don't have to do that for me, I mean I don't feel that tense." Hannibal had to hold back the smirk that played at his lips.

"My dearest Will," He spoke as he let go of Will's cock and straightened himself, his hand rested on the inner of Will's thigh, as he slowly began to soothingly rub the flesh. "It's not greed if you take what I offer you." He said and it took Will a few seconds to realize what the good doctor ment. Finally, that blossom of red invaded his face and Hannibal knew that his words struck him. Putting Will at ease knowing that Hannibal understood where he was coming from and that he did not have to explain or try to make the other understand how Will liked to preform when it came to him and what he shared with his past lovers. Though Hannibal would never call Will's past partners "lovers," no that label was far above them to the point it would be seen as insulting to even give them a synonym of the word. What he and Will were going to become were lovers, they were going to make love. Not what the two of them had done with others in the past. No, that was what people would crudely call fucking, nothing more and nothing less. Crude and hormonal, where bodies just wanted a rush of endorphins and the peak of orgasmic pleasure, to help chase off that deep seated that infected all humans. What they were about to do was actual love making. Where a connection that had been made between them over time had soon roped around them. Tying them together and holding them as they connected beyond not only physical aspects off one another, but their minds as well.

Will took in a deep breath through his nose as some part of his mind that wanted to talk Hannibal out of what he was about to do for him was put to ease. The feeling of the man's hand rubbing his inner thigh also helped sedate that need in him, the need to give to his partner and to never take from them. Though Will still felt that need itching in the forefront of his mind, the argument to be made dancing on the tip of his tongue, he pushed all that aside to give Hannibal a small jerking nod. The smile that ghosted the man's face, it could be described as sinful, but also pleased as he was given permission to move forward with what he wanted for Will. What Hannibal did next with his consent sent a hot striking spark up his spine and had his eyes widening. Hannibal, without hesitation, took hold of Will's cock and ran his tongue from base to tip. The way the wet, hot flesh felt as it slid over his cock, had sent a harsh wave of pleasure through him. The dark look Hannibal had given him did not help hold back the wave as he slowly repeated the action on the underside as well, going just slow enough to cause nothing but sparks to fly up Will's spine. The two wide licks from Hannibal's tongue were followed by the man taking in Will's cock with ease.

Claiming him all the way to the base and it made Will's eyes widen at the sight, seeing Hannibal with his cock in his mouth it felt unreal. For a reason he could not explain, his mind could not linger with that thought for long, because Hannibal began to move. Slow and steady, his head bobbed up and down, as he held Will's cock in his mouth, surrounding it in wet heat, his tongue slowly sliding along the side, making sure with each bob the tip did not hit the back of his throat. Will slowly began to lay back, letting the feel of Hannibal's mouth giving him muted pleasure. One hand still rubbing soft circles in the underside of his thigh, giving him comfort, while the other left its hold and moved down. Will took in a sharp breath when he felt Hannibal cup his balls, rolling them around in his large hand, slowly pulling them down, before guiding them back towards his body. It was completely different from other times someone went down on him, all they ever did was give his penis their attention, not once did anyone ever decide to do the same with his testicles. Turning that muted pleaser louder as Hannibal continued to slowly bob his head, hollowing out his cheeks, creating a pulsing pressure as he began to draw out that orgasm that wanted freedom since they were down stairs. Will attempted to keep himself under control, gripping the bedsheets and grounding himself to the bed, in order to not buck his hips; though the reflex teased at his body, even going as far as to distract his eyes.

But that did not help in the slightest, because the amount of mirrors in the doctor's room was intense. There seemed to be one hidden in almost every corner as if the man enjoyed viewing himself in every angle. Every time Will tried to avert his eyes from his or Hannibal's reflection, they would just become captured all over again. It had that tense feeling Hannibal spoke up slowly washing over him, taking each individual muscle of his and squeezing them. Reminding him how different he and Hannibal were when it came to personality and how they viewed their own selves. One basked in the reflections those mirrors held, understood what they were seeing and took pride in the knowledge of what stood in the mirrors hold. The other wanted to break them, to shatter the image they hold, because that was what their true reflection was. Nothing but shattered pieces only masquerading as something whole for others to view.

Until he fully gave up on the idea soft distraction and closed his eyes, letting his body experience the pleasure Hannibal's skilled mouth was gifting him. How arousing his tongue felt as it continued to caress the sides of his cock, the suction that Hannibal created, the way his lips felt wrapped around him as he continued to slowly bob. Up and down, up and down. The stimulation to his ball's all of it adding together, making that building release approach in pulsing waves. The heat of his own body, rising heat beat and panting breath, until finally.

"Hannibal." Will heavily breathed out as he found himself standing on the edge, ready to give at any moment. Will knew Hannibal had heard his breathy warning as the man began to pick up his pace, coaxing Will to completion as he focused more on movement and suction, letting Will's cock slide over his tongue instead of having it swirl around it, the hand stimulating his ball's focused more on squeezing and then pulling. All coming together until finally. A shutter traveled through Will's body, his eyes opening as he took in a deep breath. His back arched an inch off the bed as he curled his toes and tightened his gripped the sheets. A hot pulsing orgasm covered his body, letting off a few sparks in its wake as it took hold of him. As he felt himself release into Hannibal's wicked mouth.

After a few seconds of nothing but Will's panting breaths, Hannibal, slowly pulled away, releasing Will's now soft cock from the warmth and hold of his mouth. Pulling back as he felt Will relax and be taken over by his orgasm, an orgasm Hannibal had given him, with only the usage of his mouth and hand. The taste of Will's release still lingering heavily on the cannibal's tongue as he slowly sat back up, rolling his neck to the left and right. Before his eyes settled on the heavy breath, skin flushed Will, who looked back at him with heavy lid eyes. As if he was waiting for Hannibal to do something else, perhaps the agent expected him to go spit or even wash his mouth out. But Hannibal did neither and the small look of realization that crossed Will's features spoke of at a volume that added to Hannibal's view of superiority towards those of Will's past.

I wonder my dear Will, how many women have willing took you into their mouths, how many have managed to guide you to completion, then to only spit out what you had released into their mouths? How did that action make you feel as you looked at them with their poorly disguised looks of disgust as they quickly rid their mouths of your sperm. Did you feel disgusted with yourself as their elevated emotion flowed into your own mind, knowing they felt that way because of you? Did you regret accepting the offer and feel ashamed afterwards. Do not worry though when it comes to your pleasure and how I handle it, because when it comes to you, I feel no disgust, no shame, no need to cleanse my palate of you. And in due time you will feel the same when it comes to me as well.

"The idea is that you are now in a more pliant state of both mind and body. No more thoughts of needing release weighing on your mind, or breaching the first act of intimacy lingering in the way." Hannibal spoke as if he hadn't just given Will a blow job, the idea that Hannibal could act so nonchalantly about the whole thing, caused a slight swirl to form in Will's chest. A mixture of liking how put together the man was even in this interment situation, but also disliking the fact he had no other reaction to follow the act, as if it ment almost nothing to him. Will felt the urge to change that, to see Hannibal come undone at some point and see him aching to have him or something along those lines. "But you are far too over stimulated to continue our intimacy with penetration, I find it best that we slowly build you back up, not to full state of arousal." Hannibal began to make his way back over to Will, until they were holding their original position once more, with Will underneath him. "Only to where you will be comfortable and only feeling," Hannibal leaned in his lips ghosting over the shell of Will's ear, "the pleasure we will share." Not missing how Will's skin reacted to his promise, as millions of bumps began to appear and hair rose. Without saying another word Hannibal leaned down and began to kiss Will's neck with a mixture of subtle nips to make sure to keep Will present to his body. The familiar feeling of Will's hands caressing his back. this time less hesitance with their caresses as they ran up and down. Feeling how they moved opposite of each other over, pressing down on his muscles, fingers not digging completely into his flesh. While his left leg slowly pulled back and he angled his hips upwards, giving Hannibal the sensation of Will's wet soft cock lightly brushing against his still very hard, still aching cock. Giving him just the right about of friction to not only help build Will second wave, but give Hannibal something to aid in his own desires.

Keeping his mouth fixated on Will's neck, Hannibal moved his right hand between them, touching Will's chest once again. Moving over to the man's nipple and he began to administrate the same care Will had given him before. His fingers slowly tracing over the outer perimeter of Will's nipple, before moving into the center. Over the nerve-built bundle

with his fingers, feeling how perked the nub was ready for more attention and Hannibal was going to give it to it. Taking the nub between his thumb and index finger and began to roll it. The sharp intake of breath and miniscule arch that followed from Will gave Hannibal the knowledge of the pleasure he was feeling as Will's chest pressed into his hand as Hannibal gave a quick squeeze before continuing with the rolling his fingers. The idea that this was also the first time Will had felt this form of stimulation, along with the stimulation that Hannibal had given his testicles. It fueled Hannibal, the knowledge that he was giving Will another *first*, one right after another, it *had* the good doctor battling with his control all over again, fighting tooth and nail to keep his beast at bay while he continued to give Will these new aspects of pleasures.

His hand left Will's nipple to give its equivalent the same attention, starting with a slow caress followed by a firm touch. A balance of uncomfortable and comfortable, leaving Will's body confused on what it wanted and needed, did he enjoy the sharp tug or the soft roll, did he want Hannibal to continue with this new discovery or stop and go back to something he was familiar with? Hannibal continued with his act of stimulating Will, while he also continued to nip and kiss the man's neck. With one part of his mind waiting for Will to respond in a negative light so he could stop immediately, while the other sought out his own pleasure. That was until he found himself at the crook of Will's neck and he found himself halting at that part of the man's body. Pulling away and staring down at the patch of skin, skin where he once saw a cluster of yellow and amethyst. Marking the man for no doubt weeks, a mark that he never gave Will, a mark that he could still see though it had healed months back. It still taunted him in the back of his minding, knowing he wasn't the one to leave it there and it made his blood run hot with distain. Hannibal knew he had to fix the wrong that was made to Will's skin right then and there.

The sharp piercing pain Will suddenly felt flair through the crook of his neck had his mouth going ajar and eyes widening.

He's fucking biting me! Was the only thought the traveled through his once ecstasy fogged mind, no longer relishing on the soft trail of the orgasm mixed with the warmth brought on from the man's lips on his skin along with how he was treating his nipples. How they had started to teeter on the harsh ache from his attention, but never leaving him to want to pull away and the gentle sparks of pleasure that spoke before the ache. All that had ripped through his mind, just like the feeling of how Hannibal's teeth dug harshly into his flesh and Will was certain the man had bitten through his skin. As the familiar sting began to spread along with the sharp pain. Followed by another sharp feeling, but this one was from arousal as it shot down his spin like a bullet and went straight towards his recovering cock. There was an odd realization that followed him as he took in the out of pocket arousal that conjured itself with the idea of someone biting into his flesh. It was that if Miranda had discovered the door that led to this discovering, then Hannibal fucking Lecter busted it down for him, to where it could not even stay connected to its hinges. Suddenly without realization Will found his once tender touches on the man's back turn aggressive as he dug his nails into the man's back and without hesitation or remorse, he dragged them down.

I won't be the only one with marks left from tonight, Lecter. An almost malice voice dripped into his thoughts as he continued his hands decent. Though he would never admit he was getting off on the idea of harming Hannibal, in fact Will wondered if he could ever become

that way, he was used to soft forms of sexual acts. This was past the borderline of rough as he felt his nails leaving a wake of red and he darkly hoped blood in their wake and he felt Hannibal's jaw clench tighten. Followed by yet another low rumble coming from the man's chest as his muscles tensed. The hand that weighed heavily on Will's chest moved so Hannibal could brace himself on the bed as the two became nearly dead locked. Both causing the other pain the more pain was inflected on them and neither willing to budge.

Their bodies began to rut against each other as they continued this match of pain mixed with pleasure. Cocks caught between their heated flesh, giving off a rough stimulation that leaned towards uncomfortable friction. Giving them something, but also leaving them with nothing. Hannibal pulled away, because he could feel the oncoming slaughter of an orgasm crawling up his marked back and he would not allow it. Not allow for his seed to spilled anywhere that was not inside Will. If that ment he would have to release his hold on Will's neck and no lingering having the rush and warmth of the man's blood blessing his tongue then so, be it. There would be moments where he could be granted that taste once again, perhaps for even longer amount of time than the moment he was in. As he pulled back his dark eyes were caught instantly by Will's raging storm, the younger man stared back at him with such an animalistic anger mixed desire. Hannibal could almost hear him accusing the doctor, shouting how dare he bite him, how dare he mark his flesh like this without his permission. That dominant stare had a flicker of arousal nipping at the back of Hannibal's spine. But instead of apologizing for the blood that he knew coated not only his tongue, bur lips he leaned forward and captured Will's mouth.

Taste your life my dearest Will, taste what I taste and cherish it. Feed your wicked beast the offering of yourself and soon in the future you will be able to taste myself like I've you.

Their kiss was rough and demanding, hands grasping at their hair as both their emotions turned from exploratory and cautious to frenzy. Limbs tangling with limbs, breaths turning ragged as they devoured each other's mouth. Neither one wanting to pull back as they shared the coppery tang of spilt blood between them. Dark desires bubbling to the surface at an alarming speed that the crash would kill them both. They would continue like this until neither one of them could leave the bed whole, outsiders would look upon them and wondered what animal, what monster wrecked their bodies, leaving them in that state of disrepair. Except the two men would give a trained smile and act as though nothing happened to them at all, as if those looking at them were merely blind and seeing only an illusion.

For a second time Hannibal had to pull back, regain his control and the control of the situation. He could see the collision on the horizon even though Will could not. The empath was in no uncertainty blinded by his own recently discovered carnal lust along with Hannibal's more well-maintained beast. Leaving him in a state he was not familiar with and in need of an anchor to drag him back down and hold him in place. Hannibal needed to be in control and he knew Will needed it as well, until the man could understand and recognize his desire, his lust from that of Hannibal's. The man, knew Will was struggling beneath him as they shared panting breaths and coper taste. He stared down at Will, whose pupils were blown wide to the point it was hard to see those storming blues as he laid beneath him. Hands gripping Hannibal's arms in a tight grip that was nearing bruising strength, but Will had enough in mind to not let it near that point, it was a clear need for stability as he battled his

mind and desires. All while looking up at Hannibal with heaving chest, flushed shinning skin, and pouting lips that still held small traces of blood on them.

Blood that still graced Hannibal's pallet, a taste that he wished he could siphon more out of the man and store it way in the deepest part of his home. Take care of it as though it was a bottle of the most exquisite wine that was made by mother nature herself and only take it in when the right moment arose. So, he could cherish it all over again, letting it coat his tongue and travel down his throat, to enter his body and fuel not only his actions, but mind. The taste lingered so heavily on his tongue for a moment he feared he had ruined his palate; no longer would he be able to experience something as devein. But Hannibal was quick to push that ill thought out of his mind, he could not allow himself to think such foolish thoughts, or else he risked letting himself slip and that would not only ruin everything, but maim it to the point it was unrecognizable. And he would not allow that to happen, he would rather have the roof cave in or all the food in his fridge spoil than let himself slip.

"I believe," Hannibal spoke through panting breaths as he regained his composer. *Oh, how easy it is for me to come undone by you my dear Will.* "We are both ready to continue." He spoke as he reached forward and brushed a few of Will's stray curls in place, before looking back down at him. While he felt Will's grip loosen than disappear. Releasing him and showing that he was back in the saddle and could ease himself back down to where they started.

"I couldn't agree more." Will answered with his own deep breaths. As he watched Hannibal remove himself from his personal space and moved himself to the nightstand on Will's right. A part of him wanted to grab the doctor and pull him back over him, to reengage whatever the hell that just exploded between them. It was a frenzy of lust that Will had never felt before, it strong, it was wild and he wouldn't lie to himself it was a bit intimidating. How he felt himself slipping through his own fingers and merely acting on what his body demanded, what his instincts screamed at him to do. A part of him felt glad that Hannibal broke their kiss, that held himself above him and did not say a word, just stared down at him with the same intense look. To watch that look slowly fade away and be replaced by something more under control. It gave him something to grab on to, to hold while they both gathered themselves and Will took a step back from the mirrors of his mind and focused on himself and what he needed. And what he needed was for Hannibal to stabilize him for a moment, by just showing him that if he could gather himself than so could Will.

While he watched Hannibal move off of him, the faint taste of his own blood lingered in his mouth, with his mind semi clear the realization slowly dripped. Hannibal had bitten him so hard that he punctured his skin without hesitation. Jagged sharp teeth digging into him with no remorse, how easily the man had done it made Will's already racing mind spin. Then when it was obvious the man had his fill with sinking his teeth in him, he pulled back and made out with him like a feral beast. Will laid flat on the bed staring up at the ceiling trying to understand why the thought didn't exactly turn him off or why it brought something out of him like it did. What volume did that speak of him, that an action near beast like could coax something out of him that he did not want to acknowledge. Yet the relief that floated over him felt almost intoxicating, so freeing and that thought nearly frightened him.

Before Will found himself spiraling for the thousandth time that night, Hannibal was already shifting back into full view. With a small fancy glass jar in his hand, Will wasn't a complete dunce when it came to male with male intercourse, but the idea that Hannibal had a jar in his bedroom full of no doubt expensive lube he couldn't stop himself from commenting. "Already christened the bed, have you?"

Hannibal took in the question with a consideration and thought. His head tilting slightly to the side with a soft look of contemplation, before he spoke. "Now that the thought has occurred, no I have not christened my bed in this way." Hannibal went back to the jar taking off the lid and analyzing the contents that the jar held. "But I also want to be prepared for when the moment arises."

Will let out a chuff of a laugh as he brought himself to sit up leaning back on his forearms. "Must be nice to be so confidant in this aspect. Knowing a time will arise at some point and hold knowledge that you are prepared for it."

"There will be time for you to gain the same confidants." Hannibal spoke as though he could predict the future as he used two of his fingers to gather a considerate amount of lube. "Now, I wish to not insult you because I assume you understand the steps that need to be taken in order to prepare oneself for anal penetration." He spoke with a tone of the surgeon he used to be. Talking to Will as though he was a patient of his, but at the same time there was a slight touch of light humorous tone. In order to keep things from sinking to the point neither one could see it as the dark waters covered it from light.

"Thanks for keeping my intellect in mind." Will said as he rolled his eyes and tried to hide the small smirk that wanted to play at his face with such a statement. "But yes, though I am inexperienced I'm not entirely clueless." He added, not so much to make Hannibal aware that he wasn't completely blind at the idea of how men experienced sexual performances, but also remind himself that he wasn't that seventeen-year-old kid, who only knew certain pieces of how intimacy worked between a man and woman from books and media. With the occasional adult magazine that he would find, either tucked into a space that his dad thought he wouldn't stumble upon or laying out in the open in one of the other dockers boats or shops. Will had to remind himself he had experience, he held some knowledge and had at least some ideas of what was going to happen.

"It is no issue at all keeping your intellect in mind." Hannibal spoke with that humorous glint in his eye and Will found himself fighting back that urge to pull that man back on top of him and restart that primal make out session they had, with colliding lips, limbs tangled, and pain fighting with pleasure to overtake the experience. Just to leave Hannibal undone once more and Will had to suddenly wonder where these thoughts were coming from, when did he become such a violent lover, was it Hannibal's doing or just his own brought out by the well-spoken man? "But I do find it is in best interest to know the steps we are about to take, but I will refrain from speaking in an informative manner." He continued. "I doubt that will set the mood."

"Might as well read from a text book." Will commented as he back to watch Hannibal coat not only his fingers, but his cock as well, in slow rhythmic motion. Only looking to coat the body part and not give it any pleasure, the thought that that part of Hannibal was at one point

going to be inside of him. Introducing him to a world of pleasure he had never felt before. Another soft tingle of arousal traveled down to his semi-hard cock.

Hannibal let out a small warm chuckle at Will's dry joke. "Yes, might as well." Hannibal set the jar aside still in reach, in case of discomfort that he knew might accrue while they began to prepping stage and possibly the insertion. He then moved closer setting himself directly between Will's legs and Hannibal tried his best to not let the thought that this will be the first time that Will would be experiencing this and he was going to be the one to give it to him, cloud his mind. Though he spoke of not wanting this to feel or seem like something they had read from a text book or heard from a lecture, he had to keep his mind focus. In order to keep Will arousal in mind and make sure he would become relaxed in the moment, for if he couldn't then their intimacy would slowly trickle down. Hannibal could already picture Will becoming discouraged and frustrated with himself if he couldn't properly get his body to relax like it needed too. Then blame himself for not being able to give Hannibal what he wanted, probably offering to give him the same treatment he received earlier. While knowing that was not what the older man wanted, but would take and their whole time together becoming a form of disappointed that neither wanted to admit and have it slowly festered and infect them to the point they would end up drifting apart. Because Will could not handle the awkward and embarrassment that burned him from the inside out.

"Now, I suggest you lay back and relax as much as possible." Hannibal instructed as he waited for Will to comply, as soon as he nodded his head and began to lay back, Hannibal continued. "It will feel alien at first, you might even feel the urge to clench and reject, that is normal." Hannibal emphasized, driving the point that Will's body will fight back slightly and that is of no fault of his own, that he wouldn't be doing it on purpose. Will nodded his head and Hannibal returned the gesture with one understanding nod. "But if there is at any point you feel uncomfortable and need me to stop, please speak up and we can take a break and discuss the steps to take." Hannibal waited for another nod and Will gave it to him. "Good, now let's continue." Hannibal said as he maneuvered Will's legs making sure they were bent and sat sturdy on the bed. Spreading them, in order to position himself between those strong thighs that begged to be covered in Hannibal's bite mark and bruised by his grip. He dragged his mind away from the idea, back to what was waiting him at the moment.

Will took in a quick breath through his nose as he felt one of Hannibal's fingers slowly circle around his rectum, getting the area used to the feeling and making sure to cover the area with enough lube to make sure everything was safe. But he never penetrated, though Will tried to fight his body, he could already feel himself begin to clench. His own body going on instincts of trying to keep the finger out of him, even if he tried to relax.

"Focus on my voice Will," Hannibal's warm velvet spoke when he noticed Will's body already begin to grow rigged. "Rest your head on the pillow, eyes closed and focus on the sensations that I am giving you." He looked up and over at Will making sure the man following his instructions, all while he continued to make Will's rectum familiar with the sensation that was his circling finger, gently circling the tight ring while also preparing it for being breached, pushing into it only lightly, but never going all the way in. Not when Will was still too tense. He watched as Will did as he was instructed, his eyes closing while he took a deep breath through his nose and let it out. "Good, just like that." Hannibal went back to focusing on Wills body, feeling those muscles slowly loosen over time. After a few more

circles and light probing Hannibal spoke. “I am now going to insert one finger; you can adjust if you need to or don’t it’s all about your comfort.” He watched at waited for Will do say or do something, turn away from the idea and stop everything. But the man laid still, his mind and body beginning to drift, waiting for Hannibal to continue.

The sound that escaped Will’s body when Hannibal slid his finger inside of him, it nearly made him pause. He wasn’t even in to his knuckle and Will was already reacting with sound, and muscles fighting to go tense as he grabbed the sheets. "It’s alright, take a few breaths.” Hannibal spoke in a cool controlled voice as he went to watch Will. Who wore a face of discomfort and he could feel Will’s body begin to squeeze around his digit. Will jerkily nodded his head and took a few deep breaths, before one larger one and settling back down. “Better?”

“Better.”

Hannibal nodded as he felt Will’s body relax one more before he continued to push his finger in, though he could think of a much better way to prep Will. One that involved the man on his chest and his desirable plump ass presented to him. Hannibal’s mouth buried between those torturous globs of muscles, mouth working wonders on Will’s back side to the point the man threated to explode just by the work of Hannibal’s silver tongue. The sounds that would escape the empath as Hannibal worked him lose with his lips and tongue, no lube, just saliva would be needed as he prepared Will. Using his own tongue instead of his fingers to get the man ready, long strokes with short pokes of his tongue, it would nearly have the same effect on him, holding back his own orgasm as he listened to the moans that were born through Will’s lungs and mouth. In order to fight off the need he would have to pull back and bite one of Will’s cheeks, just to reground himself. Yes, that would be a much more pleasant experience for the both of them, but Hannibal knew that the action would not go well in the moments full of firsts. Perhaps tomorrow when they would no doubt find themselves right back in this bed. Though, Hannibal could not plan for that, he could try, but with Will’s nature of sometimes proving the man wrong with taking his own path at moments notice. Hannibal could not predict when or if Will would suddenly turn to him with a dark look of desire that would have Hannibal’s heart threaten to pick up as his body began to ready itself. But that did stop him from trying to predict and prepare for a moment when Will would crave physical intimacy or if he found himself craving more from the feast that was Will Graham.

All while the swirling thoughts of their next intimate moment would thrust itself upon them, when the mood would strike, Hannibal had begun to slowly thrust his finger in and out of Will’s still tight entrance. Feeling as it took his finger and fought the bodily instinct to clench around the probing digit, the lube doing its job at making it easier for them both. Soon Hannibal saw fit to add a second finger, moving to the stretching part of the procedure. Yes, he had to call it a procedure, acknowledging it as anything else would no doubt be fighting his still aching cock that throbbed painfully between his thighs.

Begging him to through all this away and so it could already slip inside of Will. Hannibal took a deep breath through his nose and fought back the urge as he pulled his finger out and added the second digit. Gifting him another shuttering sound from Will, as he pulled his legs back and gripped the sheets with eyes squeezed shut. Hannibal quickly placed his free hand on the outer of Will’s thigh, right where the flesh merged into his buttock, giving slow

soothing circles into the flesh. Letting him know everything was alright, he was aware of the signals Will was sending out like flashes of LED lights. Hannibal knew Will could take his fingers and whatever else he through at him, the man could take as many blows his body and mind could handle and still find himself standing on shaky legs. With a look of either stubbornness or determination waiting for more. Too bad Will did not see himself that way at some points, this being one of them.

Will once again found himself forcing his body to relax as he felt Hannibal's slender fingers begin to push into him. The feeling of having two fingers moving in and out of him in a slow rhythmic motion was something he could not describe. It was odd he could say that, uncomfortable in a way that you would describe wearing a jacket a size smaller than what you were used too. You could adjust to it and deal with it for a few minutes, but at some point, you are going to want to rip it off of you and take a breath of relief when you threw it aside. He knew this was part of the process and he also knew this was not his favorite part. Just lying there on the bed feeling the two fingers going in and out in and out, but never truly out only past the middle digital, before sliding back in. His hands slowly unclenched the sheets as he began to grow accustomed to the feeling, the way Hannibal rubbed his outer thigh helped release some of the tension. But he could still feel his body on edge as a feeling of akin to anxiousness began to form in his chest. He could feel the want no the need to tell Hannibal that he had enough and was ready to move forward. He had never faced that kind of feeling before, the urge to continue to something more intimate, to push towards the part where they could jump straight into conjoining their bodies. Will could feel it building in his chest and spread to his body as his skin began to prickle and he could feel this new feeling drip and morph into arousal, making itself known through the stiffening of his cock. But he bit his tongue holding those words in the cage of his mouth, because he wasn't going to make a demand, he was going to let Hannibal have the control over this. The man had done this, he experienced this, in time he would know when Will was ready.

But as soon as Will came to terms with the fact that he was not going to be the one to voice when he was ready did those pumping fingers finally leave his body. The shift was another odd experience to face, the emptiness that he was given was close to jarring and he didn't realize he would have to adjust to. Will opened his eyes and blinked away the blurriness as he maneuvered himself so he could prop himself back up to look at Hannibal with a questioning look. Silently wondering if now was going to be the moment they had built up together. His heart beating heavily on his chest, arousal pulsing through heated blood and his body waiting to be touched, to be caressed in some form. The look Hannibal returned him with was the answer he needed, the man looked both put together and ready to come undone. Will could tell Hannibal was struggling to keep himself tied together, where he would hold one seam to keep it in intake another would snape and so on and so forth. But Hannibal took a deep breath through his nose and let it out of his mouth and like that, the struggle was hidden a little bit more. Will found himself already thinking of ways to make it sure that, that would not happen again, he was going to make Hannibal fall apart by the end of this, he wasn't going to be the only one coming undone.

Without saying a word Hannibal adjusted himself, never breaking the hold Will and himself eyes shared as they both readied themselves. His movements slow and deliberate putting on a show for Will to observe and push that need that was no doubt building on the empath, but it acted as double edge sword for the cannibal. Because the more he performed, the more his

own need grew and unlike Will, he did not have a first relief, he was much more on edge than he let on. Hannibal positioned himself between Will's legs, taking one, feeling how Will's calf went taut in his grip, before guiding it to wrap around his waist and Will mirrored the action with the other. Hannibal only broke eye contact to grab his throbbing cock that had been making itself painfully known through all this and aligned it with Will's puckering prepped hole that glistened with lube. With the head of his cock poking, but not breaching did he look up at Will. Whose chest began to rapidly rise and fall as he had watched the man the whole experience as he adjust himself. The two shared one more look, as if silently waiting for the other to pull away, yet neither did, Will gave Hannibal another nod. That was all Hannibal needed and it was hard to decipher who made the first moan as Hannibal pushed his tip inside Will's inviting warm tight entrance. Their sound laced itself together as it entered the world around them, as it filled the room and made itself known to what they both experienced at the same time.

The dark tendril sparks that slithered down Hannibal's spine as his eyes threaten to roll back, it caused his muscles to tighten and a groan begin to build his throat. He hadn't even pushed all the way and he felt the threat to come undone. He bit his lower lip, until he could taste the tang of blood seeping onto his tongue, his head tilting all the way back and muscle flexing. But he was quickly pulled out of the rising feeling that wrapped around his body like a throned vine, when Will began to tighten around him, not only his rectum, but his legs as well. The way his caves and thighs stiffened and heels tried to bury into the lower part of his scratched back, breathing becoming more frantic and eyes screwed shut. It all but threw Hannibal back into the saddle of taking control.

"There, there, all is calm, all is well. Listen to my words and focuse on my hand," Hannibal spoke as he reached forward, making sure not to push his cock in, as he took hold of Will's hand and gripped it firmly. Running his thumbs over the man's knuckles as they both caught themselves. He and watched and waited for Will to catch himself, to adjust to the new sensation of having the tip of Hannibal's cock breaching him "I am here to guide you through this, take in deep breaths and let them slip out of you, reminding you that you are not in any danger. You are experiencing something new that is all. Something with me and me alone." Hannibal watched as those frantic breaths began to control themselves and the muscles began to loosen. The two heels that still had them buried into Hannibal's lower back relaxed soon after.

"I'm, alright, I'm alright." Will spoke through heavy breaths, which had Hannibal deciphering if he was informing him or if Will was informing himself. Hannibal waited a few moments letting Will fall back into place. Preparing himself for what was to come next.

"Then we shall continue." Hannibal said, but when he went to pull his hand out of Will's grip, the man did not all it. Squeezing tighter to Hannibal's loosening grip, a need for grounding in this alien experience, a call for support, a need to keep the hold in place so he wouldn't plummet into the overwhelming feeling again. Hannibal felt the corners of his lips twitch at the act, the fact Will wanted to keep holding his hand until he could feel comfortable enough to let go. It fed both his ego and arousal, to witness Will give into his vulnerability, though he would have rather herd Will voice it in some ways, like how he breathlessly spoke his name while he was sucking Will off, the tightening of hands will work, for now.

Another heavy shuttering breath that carried the light presence of a moan escaped Will again as he felt Hannibal push himself further inside of him. A few quick sparks of pleasure popped through his body like shattering lightbulbs as he tightened his grip on Hannibal's hand, who tightened his hold back. Before Will felt Hannibal slide further into him, stretching him in a way that those two fingers couldn't, a false threat to tear him open the more Hannibal pushed in, but Will knew better, but along the discomfort there lied a small pulse of pleasure that radiated through his body in a low glow. Not touching any of those nerves that begged to explode, but were never given their demands. Will felt the urge to make a snarky comment of perhaps having the man use a third finger on him. But the thought was ripped out of his mind when Hannibal slowly pushed in some more until Will felt Hannibal's groin press firmly against him, causing another ripple of pleasure to fire; this time much more prominent, through him and another moan escaped his body. Having Hannibal's cock buried deep inside of him, it had all of him lighting up like newly purchased Christmas lights, those demands given and Will almost wished that they stayed begging. If his eyes weren't closed Will was pretty sure his eyes would have rolled into the back of his head as his back threatened to arch on its own.

"Oh God." Will breathed out as he felt Hannibal shift inside of him, sending the smallest spark of pleasure through his body that helped the small glowing orb that formed in him to slowly expand, but still not touch anything inside of him that would push him to a breaking point. Will felt Hannibal's panting breaths brush over his lips, before he felt the radiating heat from the man's skin pouring on to him. With eyes still closed Will reached forward and took the back of Hannibal's head, fingers lacing in soft ashen blond hair and brought him down so their lips could connect. He felt how Hannibal stiffened at the sudden act, it almost had Will wondering what the man expected to happen, did he expect Will to continue to lay motionless underneath him? Or did he plan to watch Will's face for more expressions as he held himself still inside of him, waiting for a crack or a chip to come to the surface than would Hannibal act? Start to move, start to act, all while Will showed signs of coming undone.

You cynical self-observant bastard, can't wait to see me come undone so you can have your fill. Starve yourself to the point where hunger hurts, stomach twisting in a knot as it threatens to eat itself. All while battling with your nature to take and your desire to give. You are tearing yourself in two, but you do not want to admit it, to let it rise to the surface, because then you will be seen as human. Human just like me. Will thought as he continued to kiss Hannibal. Nothing compared to the what they shared when blood coated their lips and tongue, this closer to that second kiss they shared downstairs where Hannibal proved that he had similar feelings towards him, a kiss of tender attraction. Will felt Hannibal relax into their kiss, while his hands came and held Will's sides. That hold gave little indication what came next and that was movement. Hannibal began to rock his hips, back and forth, in and out similar to how he used his fingers, his movements were slow and calculating. The man knew what he doing and it was showing with how he was treating Will.

Hannibal felt Will drop the hand that had laced its fingers into his hair to rest it on his back. Will's legs had remained wrapped around his waist and they tightened when Hannibal began to slowly thrust his hips. Those dark tendrils of pleasure tightened around his body as he moved inside of Will, inside of the man that he found his cracked and guarded heart yearned after since day one, but never let himself accept the fact the he, Hannibal Lecter could feel that way for any being in his life. Had the man beneath him, reciprocating similar feelings as

they finally after months of discovery, denial, and derision by a certain woman. Hannibal had finally been able to claim Will Graham. A man who slipped through his fingers like smoke, unable to hold in his hands, but could be seen so very clearly by his eyes and mind. And like a deity with fearful followers who believed the best way to appease their invisible God with that of a blood sacrifice, Hannibal was going to take it with unleased greed and hunger. He had already tasted the man's flesh and blood, now he was going to feel Will's body come undone while he buried himself deep inside of him. As Hannibal continued his slow and possibly painfully soft pace, he wanted to go harder, to be rougher, more dominate. He had experienced Will's beast when its collar had slipped and Hannibal yearned to feel that creature once again, but he knew better. Will wasn't ready yet to experience what Hannibal could give him the depths he could go and pleasure he could gift the man who often found none in his life. Hannibal could also gift him more pain than Will could understand and reveal the pleasure that hid beneath the aggressive sensation. The ideas that flooded his mind as he continued to thrust his cock in Will, the heat that surrounded him, encased him as he moved, how it tightened around him with each movement, adjusting and readjusting with each of his given thrusts. All that combined, made him close to ejaculating early, all because he could not keep his mind out of possibilities that laid in front of, Hannibal shook the thoughts of the future out of his mind as he refocused on the present.

He broke their kiss to let his face nuzzle against the side of Will's neck, feeling the man's well-trimmed beard scratch against his ear and the heavy warm breaths against his shoulder. All while he kept his hips moving at an even pace, making sure to never hit the man's prostate. Though he wanted to give Will the best pleasure he could, to have him feel like he would come undone in a matter of seconds, Hannibal still wanted to prolong their time together as much as possible. That was a hidden reason why Hannibal had given Will oral pleasure, he hadn't lied when he told him he wanted to aid Will into relaxing, but he also wanted to make sure Will went through the cycle of recovering. Hannibal, hadn't expected Will recovery period to be so short. He had felt Will's spent cock slowly become hard while he was stimulating his nipples and he definitely felt it become stiffer when they had hungerly kissed. To say Hannibal was surprised was an understatement; another reason not to underestimate the empath. But where Will was best in recovery, Hannibal matched in longevity, he could pace himself to last as long even in some instances longer than his partners.

Will felt his body rock with each and every thrust Hannibal gifted him, the feeling of that girth inside of him being pulled and pushed back in, but never going deep enough to cause the glowing orb to turn brighter than a new born star, it wasn't a lazy rut something to experience in the morning or a start of another round. It was precise and calculated, it only took Will a moment through his fogged lust filled brain to understand what Hannibal was doing and if sensing his realization, the doctor tightened his grip on Will's waist. Fingers digging into the soft heated flesh with a near bruising grip, but never stepping over the line. It was a warning that he knew that Will understood his plan and if he tried to change anything that he was willing and ready to make Will aware of the power he currently had on him. It also had another moan escape Will's lips as if to just prove a point like the smug bastard that Hannibal was, the man pounded his hips harder than before. Burying himself deeper into Will where his cock brushed against his prostate and that moan turned into a.

“Fuck.” He hissed out as he pressed his heels into Hannibal’s lower back and the hand that still held Hannibal’s tightened. As a sharp point of pleasure traveled through him like a rogue bullet and hit ever target it was ment to. It burned like holy fire and that orb that birthed itself flashed that bright light filling him in seconds before fading back into place. It was toxic, it was a punishment and it was also addictive.

“Growing impatient, are we?” Hannibal asked as he brought his face out of Will’s neck. “No longer satisfied with gentle touches.” He spoke as he leaned in and nipped at Will’s earlobe and gave him another teasing thrust. Feeling how Will tightened around him when he did so. “Can feel the dark primal need to turn our time of exploration to more of a discovery. To see what boundaries we can push each other than ignore the signals we send out to face something akin to destructive.” He spoke as though he had read Will’s mind and body and Will hated that idea. To be seen as so open to the idea that he had nothing to shield himself if it all came crumbling down around him. “In due time my dearest Will, in due time.” He whispered, voice sultry near sinful, the tone that that Lucifer used to trick Eve into taking that fateful bite. Hannibal laid a few light kisses on Will’s jaw feeling it stiffen under his lips. As he spoke of keeping Will in place beneath him as he slowly hand fed him a pleasure he had never experienced, Hannibal felt that annoying feeling of his own impatience bubbling inside of him. He wanted to see that beast of Will’s more and more, wanted to see what it would be like to give him the reins at the moment, let him hold the power.

The idea over powered Hannibal’s mind and body, as he could not fight the intrusive thoughts of having Will in control. To control the decisions made between them, to direct what pleasure and what pain would be given to them as they continued on in their moment of lust. For Hannibal to let go of the strong will he had, to let the person suit of someone always in control to finally slip free of him. The idea had a low spark traveling up his spine, starting where Will’s heels dug into him. The spark made it very hard to focus, it pulsated through him like the heavy heart beat that came from his and Will’s chest as they continued their slow rut. Pulsating harder and harder to the point he could not differentiate what was the spark and what was his own heart, pounding in the base of his skull, no longer just his spine. Hannibal could not take it anymore, he must experience the switch, to see, to feel what Will was like when the ball was in his court. Hannibal took a deep breath readied his body, he let go of Will’s hand and slid it under his shoulder while the hand that squeezed Will’s waist traveled behind his back. Hannibal could sense Will’s building confusion, but before those pieces to come together to form a coherent state of perplex. Hannibal rolled them both, Will let out a sound of surprise that was close to a yelp of surprise as he quickly latched onto Hannibal as the man rolled them into switching positions on the bed.

Will felt the world spin around him, in a dizzying collage of flesh and fabric as up became down and down became up. All slotting into place when the spinning finally slowed and came to a stop, Will finally realized what move Hannibal pulled as he opened his eyes. Blinking away the mist that covered his vision to reveal that he had his weight sinking into Hannibal as he looked at the man at an odd angle of laying half way on top of him. Will blinked a few more times in order to control his mind and pull it to the present as he came to fact Hannibal had rolled them over.

“You know you could have told me you wanted to switch positions.” Will said with a small amount of reservation to the fact Hannibal had pulled such a move. Which had Hannibal

feign a look of contemplation as he took in Will's words, eyes looking to the side, eyebrows slightly raised. It really did not take much for Hannibal to become smug.

"I could have, but then where would the spontaneity come from," Hannibal spoke as his eyes returned to Will, he reached up and ran his hand tenderly through those damp curls. Feeling how they wanted to cling to his wondering fingers and how Will fought not to melt into the small act of affection. The poor man was so touch starved it both hurt and pleased Hannibal, he could not wait to exploit and to feed it. "When you are always so close to picking up subtle changes in behavior and predicting movements, I must act in moments when your guard is either lowered or focused on something else. You know that my dearest Will." Hannibal breathed out and Will could feel the large decompression of Hannibal's chest beneath him. How Hannibal's ribs moved under his weight, given him the strange urge to press down even harder, just to feel how Hannibal's bones would creak and strain underneath him. Will quickly pushed that thought aside, it wasn't the time or place for something like that to start growing in his mind.

"Still some indication ahead of time would be appreciated."

"Noted."

Along with guidance on what to do now that Will was on top, would also help. Because for a beating moment Will found himself unable to move from his new position. He still had Hannibal inside of him, the man managed to move them without having to pull out and Will found himself feeling oddly impressed. But it wasn't the time to be impressed, because he had to figure out what to do with himself. Did Hannibal expect him to start moving, to suddenly know what to do, because that was the farthest thing for him. If anything, Will felt hesitant to straighten up, to sit back, he had made the inner claim of wanting to ride Hannibal like a bucking bronco. But know that he was in the position to do so he hated how he was getting cold feet. Yet when he looked back at Hannibal, those warm eyes that silently told him to take his time, that there was no rush and he had faith in Will to preform however he wanted. If this was too much too soon it was perfectly fine to stop where they were. Will could feel those icicles begin to melt away from him and a slow warmth of confidence begin to replace them.

Hannibal moved his hands to rest on the side of Will's shoulder as he helped Will slowly sit up. A small spark of pleasure rippled through his cock as he felt the new change of position take shape. He bent his knees up to give Will stability while he repositioned himself. Feeling Will's legs on either side of him, the bed dipping under their weight as he watched Will sit up fully until he was looking down at him. Hannibal could still see traces of uncertainty in the empath's eyes, and the desire to see that trace be over taken and discarded once everything came together. Will only needed a few more guiding words and actions and he would be ready to take control.

"I believe you are familiar with this position Will, I have no doubt others have performed it for you," Hannibal slid his hands from Will's shoulder so they could take hold of his hips. "Often referred to either cowgirl or cowboy, where the recipient takes their pleasure from their partner. Giving them the power and control during their sexual performance." Will

fought the urge to roll his eyes. Even with his cock up his ass, Hannibal could still sight spouts of knowledge as if reading it from an article.

“Yes Hannibal, I know what the position is and how it works.”

“Excellent, because what I want Will is for you to take from me,” Hannibal began to guide Will’s hips up. Finding no resistance from the man as he began to rise. Not completely sliding off of his cock, but coming close to the tip. “I want you to find your pleasure and take from me,” Hannibal began to guide Will down until he was back to sitting against Hannibal. Hannibal noticed the soft look of discovering pleasure over take Will’s features, how his eyelids began to hood over his eyes and lips part as silent moans were carried on his breath. “Until I am left completely barren and then take as much as you can from my bones that are left behind.”

When Hannibal began to stop his guidance of Will’s hip, letting the man test the waters of how he wanted to take this new position. Which Will did, he continued to move himself up and down trying to find a rhythm that suited him, that gave him pleasure. Something Hannibal wanted to not only witness, but experience, to have Will take his pleasure from him instead of being given it. Will’s eyes completely opened as he stilled his movements and Hannibal witnessed as those once hazed lust filled eyes on the bridge of tears sharply turned down to view him. Hannibal felt for a moment his breath be dragged out of his chest as Will looked down upon him with eyes sharp enough to rivel any one of his knives and surgical tools combined. Where that hesitance rest for so long, nestled into those turning seas, those mixing tides of soft and coarse, there lied that beast that could take control. Knew how to hold Hannibal still and make sure he behaved, would take its fill and then some. A deep heated thrill poured over Hannibal’s body as he looked up at Will, watching and waiting for the man to decide his fate once he started.

Will could not describe the feeling that came over him as he looked down at Hannibal, it was a dark swirl of desire and demand. Accumulating into a feeling of complete control, of a hard stance of dominance that coated his brain and body like a heavy hot weight. Wrapping around him and sinking into him with liquid power, knowing he had some warped control in the moment that would not lost long. Though Hannibal had given him the imaginary reins, told he to take charge, Will knew that Hannibal would not last long without having some form of control back. Though Will could sense that Hannibal wanted this, needed to witness what Will could create, could give, could take. Hannibal would feel that pull to be in control, the tug of dominance that clung to him like the rich cologne he wore that was starting to stain Will’s skin the more they were together. Seeping into him and aiding in bringing out his own desire to take control of the situation. Stepping behind him and slipping into place of his bones and muscles. Guiding his feelings, showing him what lied beneath the outer world he wondered in, what he kept in place for so long that it hardened in a shell and refused to crawl out. Until now as he looked down at Hannibal, finally acknowledging the power he was gifted, a quick offer that would be taken away at the first moment Hannibal felt that need to be back in control. Showing Will how easy it was for the doctor to not only give up the power, but how easy he could take it back. Will seen his opportunity and he was going to take it.

He spread his hands on Hannibal's chest, fingers splayed out as he felt the want to push further down into the man's ribcage, the powerful muscle protected be cartilage and bones beating like a well-tuned drum under his palms. Will adjusted his hips slightly, trying to find that right angle that would lead him to his destination point; the whole time he looked down at Hannibal, before he felt he was in a suitable position. With a long inhale, chasing away that last bits of weariness that still clung to him like loose threads, he began to move. Rising himself up and lowering himself down, first slow riding out the odd harsh sparks the filtered through him. Making his skin prickle and muscle twitch as he felt Hannibal's cock shift up and down inside of him, spreading him with its girth as it continued to give him those wet sparks. He felt Hannibal's grip tighten on his hips, fingers digging into skin, not to control him, but to hold on as he took his pleasure from Hannibal. As he raised and lowered himself feeling that spark of dripping pleasure shoot through his body every time, he indulged himself into hitting that one spot that sent those sparks though him. Same sparked that were once struck by Hannibal when he used it as a warning when Will became too agitated by only laying on the bed and taking what Hannibal was gently giving him.

Will wasn't going to abuse that part of him right away, no if Hannibal wanted to drag this out, he would oblige, Will could control that greedy need to spear himself over and over again with an abusive pace building up until he exploded with ecstasy, leaving him a withering mess of sweat, tears and an ache he would not regret dealing with. Will knew how to control himself in bed, to hold out until his body had to take control and finally have the release it needed to go on. Right now, while he rode Hannibal was not one of those moments where his mind and body fought, no, right now they worked together to drag out the pleasure they had craved for so long. They were going to work together, Will believed that is was his natural southern stubbornness that was helping stringing him along when it came to his movements and when and when not to let himself feel those untapped mounds of pleasure that coursed through his body like a raging fire, with no care what part of him it burned as it travel up his spine and exploded in those tantalizing rods of light that cascaded down as another ball of flames shot up.

Hannibal watched with star stuck eyes as Will took his pleasure from him. Taking in the image that Will unknowingly made for him. How his head lulled back, eyes closed and with lips pulled back to reveal those teeth that still yet to mark his own skin like he marked Will. How those tangled curls that stuck out everywhere bounced with their owner's movements, how Will's muscles flexed under skin that shined with perspiration and held a soft red glow from building desire. The feeling of Will's fingers and palms pressed flat across his chest, subconsciously holding him in places as Will kept taking from him. Feeling Will raise and lower himself in a rhythm only he knew, giving himself the pleasure Hannibal told him he could take, now and again gifting himself the pleasure of hitting that one bundle buried inside of him, but never taking advantage of the instant pleasure it could give. Hannibal watched as Will took and took from him, rolling his hips one moment and bouncing the next, sending Hannibal his own waves of pleasure to him as Will would clench and grind in a speed that had mirrored his own prior to the handoff of dominance, causing a tight vise grim to encase his cock before releasing, another throb of teasing pleasure to wrap around his body, followed by Will lifting and lowering himself. Both moaning in their shared octave as Will repeated the action repeatedly before deciding he would not let Hannibal own the idea of predictability. Will tighten himself and begin to rise, pulling on Hannibal and created a near painful pull that touched at the more masochistic part of him that hid itself so far back in his

mind that he had forgotten it was there. It made him question who was the true sadistic one of the two as he felt Will's fingers dig into his chest, nails putting a light sting oh pressure on to his skin, in order to leave indentations and nothing else. Another groan mixed moan form pain and pleasure escaped him as he continued to experience what Will was giving him in their heated moment.

Watching Will on top of him bathing in his own rapture as he finally let himself have that control, finally acknowledge that Hannibal had stepped down and handed him the reins. Hannibal found himself sketching the image of Will in his mind, opening his sketch book, picking up a freshly sharpened pencil and laying down the image. Where it would reside on paper and in his mind for as long as time could hold the debauchery image of Will Graham. Hair askew, skin glowing, shining and features a mix of pleasure and discomfort, while his muscles flexed with each one of his movements as he worked himself to the point of sought out release.

Then those eyes, those eyes that would allude him for days on end, whose contact, whose gaze could either be defined as a gift or as a threat. Those eyes slowly showed themselves, as they looked down upon him through dark lashes and held a sharpen knowing gaze. They looked down at him as if he was that offering to the vengeful deity searching for the righteous reason to strike the earth with all their power. To show the mortals the reason they bowed in its presence, why they fear it when the thundered boomed and lighting sticked. When the wind turned cool as artic ice and dead as a forgotten corpse. Those eyes looked down upon him with such a dark power that Hannibal felt his heart shutter at what those eyes potentials were when they turned merciless. They walked that very line as Will looked down upon him, as he continued to move, to bring them both aching pleasure. Teasing their bodies to the point they would break before coming anywhere close to ecstasy.

All Hannibal could do was lay there stricken down, by the being that had over took Will, that crawled out of its shell and sewn itself into the man's body. That being that took its fill from him could rival those archangels that painted themselves in religion. Soldiers of God, that were sent out to strike down sinners and demons, that either aided in the development of God's children or make sure evil never prevailed. Acting as judge, jury, and executioner in cases where evil had grown too powerful for humans to control or overcome. That very creature must have entered Will's body, because that would be the only explanation to the treatment Hannibal was receiving from the empath. He was being judged, he had stood before a being labeled as holy by others, a being with higher meaning that it did not fully comprehend, graced with angelic features and righteous virtue. Hannibal stood before the man with skin barren and intent clear and he was being judged.

A moan escaped him as he laid his head back and closed his eyes, letting his body experience the treatment he had opened himself to. Feeling the rhythmic motion of Will's hips, the tightening of leg muscles the caged his sides. How the bed rocked beneath him, Hannibal began to rise and lower his hips, matching Will's pace, pushing in when he would lower himself, pulling out when he lifted and when Will would grind and circle, Hannibal fallowed. Angling himself in a way that caused Will to shudder from the unexpected pleasure that Hannibal provided. All their actions twirling together and pushing them to that heated climax they both not only wanted, but needed. They were coming close, the buildup was rushing through him like ragging waves, and by how Will's movements began to stutter and become

sporadic. Those hands that held his chest, their fingers began to curl inward, nails no longer digging into his flesh, no longer causing a bite of pain and Will's muscles began to tighten. His eyes closing tight while he clenched his jaw, Will was growing so close it was becoming hard to fight it off. Hannibal could feel his cock begin to twitch and build pressure, close to spilling inside of Will, he dug his fingers into Will's hips, to a point the skin turned white and red from the pressure.

But Hannibal was not ready, no if he was going to lose himself completely with Will, he wanted them to be closer. No longer on different grounds when they orgasmed, neither either looking down or looking up at the other. Hannibal pushed himself upwards, muscles straining under the tensions and Will's eyes flashed wide open as he felt Hannibal move under him. Once again shifting their position without word of warning. Hannibal slowly sat up, adjusting his legs and wrapping his arms around Will's back to keep him from falling. Will's hands scrambled to grab Hannibal's shoulder as he felt himself shifting, but even the movement could not make Will blind to the harsh wave of electric pleasure that rampaged up his spine because of the new angle he was placed in. The way Hannibal's cock pressed into in in the new angle had him clenching his teeth and already strained muscle cry out as they tried to tighten even more because of the harsh wave that entrapped them. Before slowly relaxing as they settled down to look upon one another.

While Will sat in Hannibal's lap and stared faced to face with the man and that was when that inkling feeling of Déjà vu captured his mind as he looked upon the man. For a brief heart racing moment Will could have sworn he was going to hear the sound of falling leaves and feel cold dirt underneath his baren skin, perhaps even see Hannibal's throat open wide and crimson begin to pour out. It made him involuntarily stiffen and tense, which must have done something because Hannibal winced slightly as a short hot breath escaped his nose and he went to control himself, but it did not work. He still looked far too human for Will to see any resemblance to the man who always presented himself as above others. Skin shinning with sweat, breath heavy and hair a mess, this was what Will wanted to see. To see Hannibal looking and feeling like him, how he could stay still and watch him for hours. Observing the man, seeing the being that laid behind the three-piece suits and deep analyses disguised in metaphors. Will sat still his breath heavy and cock trapped between both their hot sweaty bodies, just observing.

That was until Hannibal refocused himself on Will, the two adjusted only once for more comfort in their position. Leaning towards one another, chest against chest and arms wrapping around the body in front of them. They closed their eyes as the leaned forward and rested their foreheads against one another's, before they began their movements all over again. The fire that had built did not wither away it only dimmed before they continued and it was rightfully returned to its blazing glory. As they moved their hips with each other's, building up speed as they lifted and dropped over and over again. The only sound they could hear were their heavy breaths, racing heartbeats and airy moans that intertwine with the others. They kept going as their arousal built in a molten heat, rising, and rising, to the point they found themselves standing at that cliff point. Hand in hand, body, and body, staring down at the promised ecstasy they had built together through bold moves, experimentation, guidance and discovery they had made something the other wanted, the other needed. Something they would not change for another moment, something they would both tuck

away into their mind and revisit. Look back upon and feel the phantom touch that will ruin them from anyone else who tried to take the others place in their life.

A shuttering moan paired with an involuntary gasp escaped them as they both felt the tantalizing relief of the battling orgasm that over took their body like a starved beast. Pouning ontop of them and sinking its claws and teeth into their flesh. While a an ocean of ecstasy washed over them in hard jagged waves as they both faced their release, muscles spasming uncontrollably, their arms tightening around each other's as they rode out their shared orgasm. Making their skin prickle and flush as they tried to even their breaths while a haze coated their mind like a dense fog, before it over took their body. Cascading down their back as the orgasm left them both, slowly rolling away from them as they held onto each other for support. Hips still attempting to give through the involuntary spasm and raw ache that followed from still trying to continue even though both cocks were spent. Leaving both partners coated in remains of what carnal act they just preformed. Neither could identify who opened their eyes first, perhaps another moment of bodies mirroring the other, revealing how truly connected they were together. Hannibal and Will looked at one another, stormy blues staring at deceitful maroon. As their chest heaved with breaths and tension drained from their body, leaving their muscles pliant as they held each other, not saying a word, not wanting to make the first move to break apart as they looked upon the other. Bodies connected and minds holding the others, as they took in the sight of vulnerability the other wore for them, not yet reaching to hide behind the masks they wore. Leaving them behind like their discarded clothes.

"That was, that was." Will let out a huff of a flustered chuckle as he turned his face away. He was never good at commenting about sexual escapades. Never good at giving feedback or heavy praise. If his partner said something first, laid the launching point, that often got him loosening his lips. But he was never the one to start the conversation and he did not know why he felt the need to break the comfortable silence. Maybe because it was comfortable silence, silence that weighed on him like an overly soft blanket and wrapped around them. Aiding in holding them close as they took one another in, hair a mess, skin flushed and a softness in their eyes that hardly ever showed itself.

"Hush," Hannibal spoke, his voice warm and comforting, as he reached up and cupped Will's face and pointed it back at him. "There is no need to fill the space with words when we both know how we truly feel about the love we just made together." Will felt his shoulders relax even more; if that was even possible, at hearing Hannibal's words of confirmation.

"Good, cause I couldn't really come up with the right words to explain what we just did." Will said with a crooked smile, a smile Hannibal easily returned.

"Don't sell yourself short my dearest William," Hannibal spoke as he reached up and affectionately brushed Will's bangs back, "I am more than certain this brilliant mind of yours could come up with some words when given the chance."

Will let out another chuckle. "Don't give me too much credit, because right now all that's going through my head are lyrics to either country or rock songs that I was forced to listen to growing up that I still find myself listening to even though I have my own free will."

"Then I politely ask you to spare me from those lyrics for the time being." Hannibal advised.

“Alright, but if we are ever in the car together and I have control over the radio, I’ll let you know what lyrics I was thinking of.”

“I can’t wait.”

A shared chuckle escaped both men as they held each other, neither one wanting to move from their embrace, wanting to bask in what they had experienced together. But both knew they could not hold themselves like that for much longer, though it was tempting to simply stay that way, they needed to move forward. Because in the end when the high of ecstasy wore off, the fog lifting from their minds, no longer ridding those exploding hormones consisting of dopamine and oxytocin. To drift in the smooth sea of unwavering bliss as they continued to hold onto one another. They needed to unravel their bodies, before all that was truly over and they were left in a mess of sweat and semen and both men knew they could not stand the feeling.

“Though it pains me to say this, we need to go to the bathroom to clean ourselves and take care of,” Hannibal’s fingers left Will’s curls to trail down hie neck and gently probe at the bite wound he inflicted upon Will. Though he would never feel any guilt for what he did, not feeling the tiniest amount of remorse for breaking the skin, he did display those false emotions when Will took in a sharp breath through his teeth when Hannibal’s fingers met the wounded flesh as his shoulder instinctually ducked out of touch. “That.” Hannibal finished as he pulled his fingers way, feeling pleased when he noticed small smudges of blood on the pads.

“Good idea, should probably check out your back, pretty sure I have pieces of skin under my finger nails.” Will muttered the last part as he looked down at his nails, though he could not see anything, he felt something under his nails. He just didn’t know if it was his imagination or not.

“Then we are in an agreement, come let me help you up.” Hannibal spoke suddenly taking charge of the situation. As he guided Will off of his spent cock, noticing how Will tensed under his guiding hands as he rose himself, both trying to pay no mind to the awkward yet satisfying *pop* that happened when both were freed. Hannibal also tried to not show any emotion when the cooling air around them met his limp cock, or the pull of missing the warmth and tightness that was Will. Almost had him regretting bringing up the fact that they could not stay in that position all night. With him buried deep inside of Will, though that thought did bring up an exercise, an experiment they could try later on. While Hannibal adjusted to longer being engulfed by Will, Will adjusted to the feeling of being empty. To no longer have something buried inside of him, moving back and forth in both a gentle and rough pace. An experience he never thought he would go though, once again questioning his own sexuality in some aspect, because for the longest time he viewed himself as straight. Never feeling much attraction to men, yet when it came to Hannibal, the list was long with what he viewed as attractive from behavior to appearances. It came to the point he did not care that thought Hannibal was a psychiatrist or a man, Will found himself drawn to him, attracted to him. Perhaps he was selective when it came to his partners, yet his last partner turned out to be a serial killer so maybe that wasn’t the best implication.

As Will removed himself from Hannibal, he tried to ignore the odd feeling of having Hannibal's semen and lube still inside of him as he moved away from Hannibal to reach the edge of the bed. With that realization in mind, he could not stop himself from blurting out. "We didn't use protection." As he turned to look over his shoulder at Hannibal, his sudden focus on the fact they just had sex raw caught Hannibal by surprise as he turned to look at him from his side of the bed taking in Will's expression, before turning his eyes way and a look of contemplation took over the good doctor's features. Before he took a deep breath through his nose and adjusted himself so he could face Will more before he spoke.

"Is see, I suppose we over looked that detail, too eager for our sexual escapade to realizes the importance of protection," Hannibal began as his eyes looked back over towards Will, "perhaps once we are cleaned, we should make a trip to the nearest twenty-four-hour convenience store and pick up a morning after pill for you." Will looked back at Hannibal with a face of bafflement at how blatant Hannibal just sounded. Will slowly blinked his eyes while he came to terms with what the man suggested, before a chuckle escaped his lips and he fondly shook his head, finding the man's unpredictable sense of humor both amusing and refreshing.

"That's not what I ment and you know it." Will said after he gathered himself, a few airy chuckles still wanting to leave him. "I'm taking about safety from diseases, other basic safe sex advice that doesn't revolve around getting your partner pregnant."

"I am aware, I am also aware that though it was ill advised for use to have made love without the proper protection. I knew I was clean and I was somewhat certain you were as well." Will found himself taken back at Hannibal's once again blatant explanation, the man was explaining something so intimate as though he was talking about a book, he just read that he could not even bother to give the title of. It pulled at Will's brain and made him wonder how he should respond to what Hannibal had voiced or if he should simply sit there and just look at him. Will chose the latter at for the time being, sitting on his side of the bed and looking back at Hannibal.

"You have nothing to fret over," Hannibal said as he reached over and placed his hand behind Will's head, an act of reassurance, "But if you feel uncomfortable, which is highly understandable. I will make sure I am properly prepared next time." In truth though Hannibal was very much prepared this time, he knew what he was doing when he did not reach for the condoms when he grabbed the lube. He knew Will wasn't at risk, neither was he, they were both responsible men with the ampule amount of knowledge to know better than to risk going on with no protection. Hannibal knew for certain Will was heathy and he knew better than to question his own health, there wasn't really a risk to face. Hannibal could have slipped a condom on, but then he would have missed the full sensation of having himself inside of Will, the way Will's never touched slicked walls tightened and relaxed around him, taking him in for the first and definitely not the last time. He would also have missed out on the knowledge that he had ejaculated into Will, in some form marking him, not only with his teeth, but with an essence of himself. No, he would not have let that opportunity be taken from him.

Will let out a deep breath as he looked over at Hannibal, who still held the back of his head. Though he was right in some degree, they were both clean, he would never doubt that, it was

the idea in general. The fact there was still a risk that Hannibal took, though Hannibal had been right that he was clean it still irked him in some form that they did not talk about it before hand. They just jumped into bed like two horny teenagers who thought the world could not touch them.

“Thanks.” Was all Will could construct as a response. Hannibal gave a reassured smile, before pulling away and getting off the bed and began to head towards what Will presumed was the master bathroom. Will slid off the large bed as well, wincing at the new ache that coated his body, his body protesting to what he put it though. It was a dull throbbing ache that of course coated his lower region that did not like the idea he was moving all of a sudden. But it subsided when he continued to move, Will knew he could handle it, like how he could stand the throbbing in his shoulder. Thinking of his shoulder he looked over at Hannibal’s back as the man continued to lead the way, taking in the rows of jagged harsh lines that decorated his back. The skin was red and agitated, Will swore he could see speckles of blood that managed to rise to the surface, along with some signs of blood that could not break through the skin. The odd thing was there was no heavy feeling of remous to crowd his chest as he looked upon the wounds he had given Hannibal. The need to apologize wasn’t forming for him, he wasn’t sorry at all. There was no regret in what he had done, similar to how there was no regret for Hannibal.

To say the after-sex cleaning was awkward would be putting the situation lightly in Will’s mind. Most people would think the most uncomfortable thing would be to experience the “talk” from their parents. But for Will it wasn’t, in reality his dad just gave him the basics of not wanting to be a grandpa at his age and if he was going to fool around like any teenage boy just be safe and make sure the girl was unattached. The last he wanted to do was bail Will out of jail because he got into a fist fight with another boy over some girl. If Will was going to compare the discomfort he felt while Hannibal explained the popper way to cleanse himself while also patching up the bite mark, Will would compare it to the time the school had an antibullying assembly and when the topic of the “loner” came up the amount of side eyes that landed on him paired with the teachers’ sympathetic looks and attempt at being caring that fallowed. That was one of the few times Will felt grateful for moving. Awkward feeling all bubbled to the point that Will was glad when Hannibal gave him the privacy to handle the ordeal on his own. though there was a moment where Will had thought the man would stay and he was positive the idea lingered on Hannibal’s mind. By how he stood by the door and watched as Will fiddled with soaps and other sanitary tools Hannibal had laid out for him. Will could feel Hannibal’s gaze on him the whole time he would pick up one and act as if he was examining it before setting it down and moving on to the other. Finally to be granted with privacy when Hannibal announced his departure and left him to his own.

What fallowed afterwards when both took care of their own issues was another shift into awkward territory. When Will had opened the door to the bedroom, he had found a pair of not only satin boxers waiting for him on the bed, but a pair of pajama pants made of the same material paired with a soft under shirt also waited for him; all neatly folded. Along with his clothes along with Hannibal’s nowhere to be seen, if Will had to guess, they probably joined his flannel that was no doubt needing a second trip through the dryer. Will could take the hint, he was staying the night, he wasn’t going to fight that, but that was not the awkward part because he expected something like that from Hannibal. He knew the man wasn’t going to let him go back to Wolf Trap anytime soon, in fact Will wasn’t really planning it himself, unless

Hannibal had told him so. The wasn't it either, when they were getting ready for bed, that was when the new feeling of awkwardness decided it wanted to hatch from its egg. Because for some unexplainable reason Will had offered to go sleep in the guest bedroom. He could handle having sex with the man, but sleeping in the same bed afterwards, that was where his mind wanted to draw the line when modesty was pretty much dead. But Hannibal; who had taken care of himself in the guest bathroom and returned to Will in a similar fit, was not putting up with Will's need to give him the privacy of his bedroom. He had seen through the poorly built barrier and managed to take it down all with a shake of his head and another polite way of telling the empath to shut up. Before basically ordering Will into the bed, which Will obliged. Knowing he couldn't keep up with his own bullshit for an argument, he simply obliged and slid into the bed. Where he was promptly engulfed by Hannibal all over again. One of Hannibal's arms wrapped around his shoulders while the other took oho hold of his upper arm and pulled him close. Until he was pressed against the man's side, his head resting on Hannibal's broad chest and his right arm on the man's midsection.

"I didn't peg you as the cuddling type." Will lightly joked while he fought down and unexpected wave of fluster that traveled over him as Hannibal him close, feeling the man's head on top of his. While his own rested on his chest with no intention of moving anytime soon, the sound of his strong heart beating in his ear. Will felt Hannibal's chest rise as the man took in a large lung stretching breath and relax underneath him, the air exhaled rushing over his head, before it lifted and rested on the headboard.

"I know you often don't perceive me as many things in many lights my dearest Will, but I am human." There it was again the way Hannibal did not speak his name without having the words "my dearest" placed in front of it. Will wasn't deaf, he caught on when Hannibal started to drop the term of endearment, the man had been so quick to label him in some way. As though had been ready for months and when the opportunity came, he struck. Of course, at the time Will didn't have the time to linger on it, to be taken off guard, he accepted it and they continued. But while he was held in Hannibal's arms after all they had been through Will wondered if he should bring up the topic of the title he was given or if he should remain silent. He settled on being silent and listen to Hannibal's smooth voice with his accent thickening on some words and slight lisp on others while he explained why he was cuddling him paired with the beat of his heart. It all danced together like a soft lullaby, it washed over him in a comforting haze as he felt his body relax, eyelids growing heavy as he controlled a yawn that built inside of him. Finally falling victim to the blood pumping carnal experience that they had done, paired with the soothing nature Hannibal was gifting him. Will found himself slowly drifting. "And the benefits to cuddling often outweigh the reasons not to, for example it aids in a better rest filled sleep as it provides comfort and reassurance. Along with aiding in emotional pain and it releases oxytocin also know by some as the cuddle chemical or the love hormone. It is the same chemical that we feel after orgasm, which can also explain why."

Hannibal trailed off when he took notice that Will had not moved or acknowledge their conversation for a few minutes. Hannibal angled his head so he could look down and he was met to a very sound asleep Will Graham resting on his chest. Muscles relaxed, eyes closed and the soft rise and fall of his chest, the warm pleased smile that played at his lips could not be contained as he watched the sight in front of him. Hannibal raised his hand, that had held Will to his side and began to gently run his fingers though Will's curls, though he would have

enjoyed nothing more than to set up a proper bath for the man to soak in, sooth those aches that Hannibal knew Will was dealing with, he had noticed the slight limp the empath had and how he winced when he move certain body parts. Yes, a nice bath with the right oils, soaps, and fragrances would have helped. All while he sat on the outside, taking care of Will's unruly curls, scrubbing the man's scalp with the product they deserved, pampering Will like he deserved. Once again that was for another time, Hannibal felt the discomfort coming off of Will while they were in the bathroom and he had gifted man the privacy he needed in the moment. Next time though there would be no privacy, only them sharing a nice warm bath together. Hannibal took in another deep breath before he leaned down next Will's ear. "Sleep well, my dearest William."

The snow had melt to a point, giving way to new born grass that contrasted the dulling white of the snow the still lingered behind. While Will stood in the middle of empty field, hands loosely clenched at his sides as he took in his surroundings. The field was large, but it wasn't infinite, in the distance cluster of trees surrounded it like a strong barrier. Reaching up with limbs that had remnants of snow still laying over them even though they showed signs of leaf buds. Buds that craved the sun's touch to help aid them into forming, yet those branches reached towards a sky that was over cast, that did not stop the sun's powerful rays though as it broke through the clouds enough to feed the earths off spring, melt the snow that trapped the life that fed from air, sun, and water. Melting snow that killed those that could not handle the harsh cold like flowers and leaves and those who go dormant. The trees that surrounded the land and the grass that covered it.

Will stood still, no longer cursed with the urge to move, not feeling the invisible pull to return to the labyrinth of the woods. To walk an endless path to a destination that only his mind knew of and would not reveal to him. Leaving him stranded and searching, wondering if he should turn back or keep going. Hollow, left without guidance, or pushed by desire or reason, leaving behind an empty pit for Will to understand as he stood still. Eyes scanning for something to give him purpose, give reason to move from his spot. To stand completely still was a stranger for him, he had always had movement in his dreams or nightmares, not once did he ever face them with stagnant. It surrounded him like a thread barren coat, providing him false coverage as it reminded him of what it used to be. Close to mocking, but wasn't harsh enough it was closer to self-pity at that point and Will could not find it in himself to shake it off.

Instead, he just stood still, on the small mound that he had found himself, there were no rows of pews filled with the living and dead, no aisle to walk down, no alter decorated with an intricate archway and more and importantly no Miranda waiting for him. With her perfect smile that could ease his mind, eyes he could feel warmth by simply looking into and voice that could hold his attention without even trying. Only nothingness, barren field with revealing life that had been trapped by fallen snow. He was given peace for once by his twisted imagination, it must have taken a break from wanting to torture him in some slithering form. That would warp around him like a starving snake attacking a scared mouse, holding him still, slowly tightening its grip the more he struggled. Until like a panicking mouse as soon as it felt its feeble bones snap and lungs deflate, he gave in to the attack. Going still and waited for death to come and put him out his misery, forced to deal with what it had in store for him.

Will took one more look around, before he decided to give in and instead of wait in trepidation for an invisible force to come and lash out. He would sit down, sit and wait out his dream, with no urges coming from him there was really nothing else for him to do. He wasn't foolish enough to go into the woods, not after spending countless nights trying to escape them, which left him with nothing else. Will lowered himself to the ground; not caring for the melting snow, or the wet earth that was there, he pulled his knees up slightly and rested his arms on top of his bent knees. He took in a lung full air, cold enough to form icicles on his lungs and watched as the air turned to steam as he breathed out. He couldn't help but recall those many cigars his dad would smoke late at night on the boat's deck. Sitting on a chair that should have been thrown out years ago with his boot covered feet propped up on the rails, at the same time every night. After that dinner's dishes were washed and put away, his dad would grumble about needing some air and head outside with a bottle of cheap booze and a new cigar. The smell of the smoke always made him sick to his stomach as a child, to the point he would throw up in secret, it was hard to keep himself from making a sound every time he retched up that night's dinner. But as a little kid for some reason, he couldn't let his dad see him puking all because of his cheap cigars that he bought by the box at the nearest liquor store. It was one of the first things his dad ever did when they pulled up to a new port, tie the boat down, talk to whoever ran the place and then go buy a case of cigars. Will often wondered if his dad knew that the smell affected him like they did and just ignored it. *I only did it secret so you could keep enjoying them, didn't want you to give up the few things that brought you some kind of pleasure. Not like I asked for the same consideration.* Will thought with old bitterness that no longer had the strength that once was there when it was first made up in his youth, like his dad the feeling was similar to an old junk yard dog. Could growl, could bite when provoked, it just took time to get it going, it simply wasn't as young as it used to be. Then again, his dad wasn't all that bad, he provided, he sheltered and now and then acted like an actual father.

Before Will could drift down the damp shadow memory that was his father, he felt something shift. The air around him suddenly changed, but not in the alarming way that would cause a grazing deer to raise their head, turn their ears and suddenly take off. No, this was different it was familiar, there was no urge to turn, to get up, nothing poked at Will's instincts to react. Will, knew he wasn't in danger and when he realized that, he was gifted with a familiar presence. In his left peripheral view, he noticed darkness that could swallow light with ease, darkness that came from thick fur that protected the wearer from the elements and the only thing that could break through the furs dense color were the gold shimmering of cursed chains. Chains that chimed with the sound of a new church bell, clinking with an airiness that could not be touched by gravity or muffled by thick black fur.

For a few lingering seconds Will did not move, did not acknowledge the old presence that found itself with his company. Sitting beside him similar to how Winston would on the porch at night, before curling up next him, not interested in socializing with the rest of the pack, more of wanting to be with his owner then the rest of the dogs. Will heard the soft chimes of chains as the wolf settled be him, the sound of snow crunching as it took a sit next to him and before taking in a large breath and letting it out. Again, Will could not stop drawing the line of similarity to Winston, the wolf sat there beside him, he could feel its dense fur brushing up against him, indicating how close the wolf was. Will knew the wolf was waiting for him to acknowledge its presence, to turn his head and look at it, to interact in some way. Like the predator it was, the wolf was patient to wait for Will to make the first move and the sad part

was Will found himself hesitant in doing so. He could not bring himself to rest his eyes fully on the burdened creature that sat next to him, not after last time. Not after he found himself falling victim to similar golden chains and giving up the fight so easily. While it suffered in front of him, looked upon him with a gaze that held disappointment. Eyes that both understood and still felt betrayed, as it fell to the ground and watched on. Giving up its own fight, as if saying "if you can succumb to the chains so easily so can I." and that pained Will, to see such a powerful being give up. It had looked upon Will for help ease its pain, to free it and Will failed it.

Will took in a deep breath and lowered his head, "I'm," Will paused for a moment gathering himself, pulling his arms back so his hands could rest on his knees. "I'm sorry." He said before turned his head up to look up at the overcast sky. "I failed you back there, I let you suffer and I let myself suffer at the same time and it wasn't fair to you. I promised you freedom and I could not give it to, because I became snared into my trap and instead of fighting it, I let it wrap around me, hold me down without even a struggle." Will licked his lips and swallowed the forming lump in his throat, his hands slowly curling into fists, feeling how his nails scrapped against the rough material of his jeans. "And for that I am truly sorry."

Silence stretched between him and the wolf, of course Will did not expect the beast to respond to him. Though his imagination was far beyond normal, he did not expect it to give the wolf the ability to speak even if this was his dream. But as they sat the only sound being the shifting of chains and their breaths, Will felt an odd weight pressing down on his left hand, the weight was heavier than he was used to, but he was familiar with the texture that pressed on his hand, it was the pads of a paw. Will slowly looked down and his assumption was right, there taking up if not most, all of the back of his hand was the wolf's large paw. Weighing down his hand and Will felt the corner of his lips twitch up and a soft chuff of air escape him in amusement as he looked down at the offering. The way the large paw eclipsed his hand, the sharp onyx claws hung over his flesh, flesh that could easily be severed with one small movement. A movement that Will knew would never come to him.

"I'm guessing that I'm forgiven?" Will asked as he turned his head to look at the wolf. Finally taking in its presence as a whole. The wolf looked back at him, with a stoic expression, Will could feel the puffs of hot air against his face as they looked upon each other. The wolf stared back him for a few moments before it slowly closed its large dark eyes, bowed its head, before lifting and opening its eyes again and deep in Will's mind, he could decipher the silent act as a yes. A small smile graced Will's lips as a weight seemed to lift from him, knowing that the wolf had forgiven him for his actions seemed to affect him in such a crucial way he could not comprehend. To find forgiveness in an imaginary animal, it would sound ridiculous to some, but for him it felt right. Will looked back at the wolf, looking into eyes that could hold so much of the world around it, but at the moment they only held his reflection and nothing else.

He could not explain what drawn his actions, could not put to words why he acted the way he did, but after a moment of staring into the soulful eyes Will closed his own. Before he slowly leaned forward towards the wolf, his head slightly bowed and the wolf lifted its paw from his hand, knowing what Will was doing and accepting his actions. Not pulling away, not giving signals of aggression as a warning, because they were beyond that. They had walked similar

pathways and Will after he showed remorse for the beast then showed shame and sorrow for his later actions, the wolf now showed acceptance to him. Soon Will's forehead was meet with the hard surface of the creature's forehead softly colliding with his. Soft fur meeting his skin as neither moved, both taking in the other as they reconnected on even grounds. A tender moment made between the two chained beings, that were captured and betrayed by those they had trusted, those they showed vulnerability to and believed they could be cared for. They now had solace in one another for however long they needed it to be. They were no longer alone and they no longer needed to fight by themselves. They had someone to lean on and help take the weight off them when it became too strenuous to bare. They finally had some ease.

Will and the wolf stayed in their shared position for however long time worked in the dreamscape. Neither moving a muscle, neither opening their eyes as they gave each other, the peace they needed, falling into a blissful state of mind, no longer did the need to observe the land held them, no need to be on look out to what might slither out of the woods, their guards were down and they could revel in the relief that fell on to them. But Will knew he could not stay like this forever, even if it was a dream he could feel deep down he had to pull back, that their time together was ending, like the last grains of sand in an hourglass. Everything came to an end at some point, even if you quickly reached over and flipped the hourglass around you would still find yourself facing the same fate. Will looked back at the wolf, taking it in for one last time up close and he found himself wondering if this creature would make his imagination a permanent residence or would be the last time he would see the animal. The wolf looked back at him and Will wished he could read the animal's mind, wondered what was going on between those worn soulful that had only the slightest glimmer of light dancing in those deep pools. "Thank you." Will finally spoke and the wolf let out one last heavy sigh of a breath before it slowly stood on its legs.

That was when something caught Will's eyes, as the wolf stretched out its long limber limbs, as it shook itself; which had him leaning back to give the large animal space, he noticed something. Those golden chains that could catch the light just right and cradle it with the hands of a loving parent, chains that easily cut through the darkness of the wolf's thick fur, there were a few less than Will remembered. Some still hung from the beast's body, warped around its sturdy frame, but not as many as before. A sense of relief slowly spread a crossed Will's chest at the discovery, to know that there was less weight, less restriction, less torment. There were still chains that clung to it like a starved snake and Will knew that there might always be some remnants of chains to haunt it, but for now there was less and that was what mattered.

The wolf stood still facing the woods, eyes searching the land, calculating its next move, nostrils faintly flaring as the wolf continued its observation. All while Will looked on in silence, not moving a muscle, only watching. Noticing how those mountain peaks for ears faced the direction its eyes were, never twitching, not picking up any sound that could weigh its mind. Its stature softened, no longer on high alert, giving Will the indication that this was their time to depart. He wasn't going to stop the wolf, ask for it to stay for only a few moments more, the request formed on the tip of his tongue and something told him that if he asked the wolf might humor him, might stand by his side or even sit back down. Will couldn't ask that of the animal, even if it wasn't that much of a greedy request, he still could

not bring himself to speak it. It was their time to part ways and Will was okay with that, he had come to terms and he could handle being left in the field for a little longer.

The wolf began to move towards the dense forest, with no real urgency in its steps, its large bushy tail sweeping the side to side the tip barely off the ground. Large paws leaving behind large prints, prints so long-ago Will had followed blindly, now he was able to witness be made. The wolf stopped at the entrance of the forest and Will straightened his posture, curious to see what it would do next. It slowly turned to look over at him, and even from the long-distance Will could still feel the eight of its presence as the beast looked back at him. Soon the tip of its large tail began to sway back and forth, not in an over exaggerated manner like many of his pack would do when he would greet them after a long day of being out. Seeing the wolf wag its tail in a subdue manner that still held enough of its more pleasant emotions to show him, it had Will's own subdue smile growing into a full grin. Yet like those grains of salt, the wolf turned away and headed into the thick woods, easily being swallowed by the season changing trees that still reached for the hidden sun and found its never wavering rays.

Will sat still in the field on the small mound he had found himself standing on, he sat there watching the woods. Not expecting anything, not fearing anything, he just sat there looking at the place the wolf walked into and disappeared in. Will looked at the woods, body relaxed as he took in a slow large breath, not feeling anything tightening around him as his lungs and ribcage expanded, complete mobility to breath. He let out the large breath the same way as he took it in and the grin had died down to a more relaxed smile as he sat there on his mound of snow, grass, and dirt. All by himself, with not impending doom, no threats of blood seeping up from the ground to swallow him whole, nothing. Only him and the field and he found peace in that. For once he found peace in his dream. An out of nowhere sensation delicately trinkled down the side of his face, it was light, warm and most importantly wet. He raised his hand up and brushed his cheek with the tips of his finger. When he looked down at his fingertips and he noticed the small broken body of a shed tear, Will looked down at the wet mark resting on his fingertips. He then looked back at the forest, a chuff a laugh, nothing strong, only a caress of amusement at the thought he shed a tear that did not hold any negative emotion in it. He looked at the forest before he finally found what words he could say in the moment, "So long, Fenrir."

The morning sun caressed the side of his face, easily stirring Will awake, he blinked a few heavy times, feeling how his eyelids clung together with each blink he attempted. His vison blurry and his right side cradled in a stiff softness he was unfamiliar with; skin being touched by smooth fabric that he only encountered once in a while. All while he tried to get his mind to form thoughts while it still fought to keep dormant in that sleep made haze, that made everything feel like it was going either too slow or far too fast. It was near dizzying to deal with, it was foreign to walk up as though he had been in a coma the whole night. Almost had him wondering if that was what most would call waking up after a night of well rest. To wake up on your own accord, fight the hands of sleep that still wanted to hold you like a possessive lover while it whispered sweet nothings into your aching ear. Will was tempted to back to sleep, it would be so easy to close his eyes and act like he had never woke up in the first place. Yet his mind was already turning its gears as the room came to focus and Will realized he was staring across a dark red oak dresser that did not exactly fit his taste, with a glass lamp sitting on top of it paired with a statue Will could not make out though clearing vision. Two

things that did not exactly match his taste in furniture, two more things to remind him that he was not in his bed, in his house, in his town.

“Good morning Will.”

Will only ever moved as fast and as hectic as he had once before in the morning and that was when he had heard a heavy thump and a whimper to fallow. His frantic attempt to sit up only did two things, made his head spin and remind him of what he had down last night, as a dull throbbing ache flared not only through his lower half, but his shoulder as well. A protest from both ends as he sat up fully it had caused a low groan to escape him as he pressed the palms of his hands to his eyes in an attempt to both stop the world from spinning and the sun to not blind his eyes. What followed was the sound of a warm rounded chuckle and a just as warm hand pressing on his back.

“I must apologize, I did not mean to startle you so early after you had awoken.” Hannibal said as he rubbed soothing circles into Will’s back and Will just knew there was humor filled smile that painted Hannibal’s face as he attempted to apologize.

“It’s alright.” Will mumbled back as he continued to gather himself and let his body ease into being awake, waiting for the dull throbs to subside. He wouldn’t lie the way Hannibal rub soft circles into his back did help some. He slowly lowered his hands and let out a huff of air, not saying anything for a moment or two, before turning to look at the man who had nearly given him a heart attack so early into the day. “You know it’s Jack who mostly startles me awake right.” An amused smirk played at Hannibal’s features, and Will couldn’t help but find himself taking in the man’s morning appearance. Hair not as neatly taken care of, in a more natural state, eyes warm and his body language soft and welcoming, he had not yet slipped into his more professional persona. Not yet readied himself to be seen as the ever respected, ever in control Doctor Hannibal Lecter, instead Will was looking at simply Hannibal and he found himself drawn to the man’s appearance, he felt the urge to reach out and cup one of those sharp cheekbones and hold him.

“Yes, I am aware of his unfavorable act of calling at the odd hours of the night and day.” Hannibal spoke, accent still thick from sleep. But Will could tell the effect was on the tail end of its life, prompting the question out of him.

“How long have you been up?” Will watched as Hannibal tilted his head to the side, those loose bangs fanning out as he did so, again making a show of taking in Will’s question as if it was a major puzzle to solve. He let out a long drown out hum that had Will raising an eyebrow and fighting the urge to cross his arms. “It’s not exactly a hard question Hannibal.”

“An hour.” He answered calmly. Will blinked a few more times at the answer, he took in Hannibal’s easy expression and how he was still in his pajamas. He knew enough of Hannibal’s habits that the man would not lounge around in his sleep wear, not even on a cozy Sunday morning like most would. So, he doubted the man even left the bed at one point even after he woke up, even if he did that did not explain why he would crawl back into bed. Because that also did not seem like something the doctor would do. He would not lounge around in his pajamas if given the opportunity and once he got out of bed in the morning, he would not crawl back into it. Taking in the way Hannibal looked with the sun’s rays crawling over his turned form, still disheveled from sleep, night shirt wrinkled and hair that looked

like all Hannibal did was run his hand through. All observations came together to paint a picture Will knew he should be turned off by, to want to wince and pull from, yet he didn't he took in the fact Hannibal woke up an hour before he did and stated.

"You watched me while I slept."

"Was it wrong of me to enjoy the image of you asleep in my arms, while the morning light cascades down up us." Hannibal spoke as his hand left Will's back and moved to the empath's hair, and Will could not help how he felt himself begin to relax, almost leaning into the touch. Eyes closing as he felt Hannibal's fingers slowly make their way through the tangled mess that was his curls, gently scrapping his scalp and starting over when they reached the end of his skull. "That would be as though you asked if it was wrong of me to stop and admire the Boboli Gardens in the spring." Hannibal stopped his fingers as he took in the sight of Will, how the man seemed to have almost melted thanks to just a soft and simple action of morning affection. "So, tell me my dearest Will, was it wrong of me to enjoy the scene I woke up to for a little while?" He asked as he leaned in close to Will's ear, his voice a husky whisper that had the hairs of Will's arm standing on edge.

Will slowly opened his eyes and looked over at Hannibal, who looked back at him with an expression that read he knew the answer before Will had the chance to speak it, but dared him to respond any other way. It made Will narrow his eyes and the look he was given by Hannibal almost made him want to say the opposite of what his answer was, just to watch the man try to gather himself as he shifted through way to reply without sounding caught off. But he couldn't find it in himself to respond like that to the man. he blamed it on not having any coffee yet, too early for mind games. "I guess it's not, but just don't make it a habit alright, I already have enough problems sleeping as is."

"Though I can give you my word I can attempt to not make it a reoccurring action, I cannot give you any promises in the end sadly." Hannibal responded with a soft pleased smile. "I would also like to offer that you seemed to have slept peacefully last night. You hardly experienced any physical behavior like kicking or harsh muscles spasms. I would say you slept rather soundly."

"Yeah, I wonder why." Will said sarcastically as he rolled his eyes before making an effort to stretch without the need to actually get out of bed. Slowly pulling back in with another morning huff as his limbs fell loose by his side while he looked across the bed towards the empty fireplace, with its mouth agape and insides still holding nothing for the room. Will could feel his thoughts begin to wondered down a fogged covered path as he stared into the empty fireplace. Becoming lost in the soot that stained the bricks, one of the few things in the Lecter household that could never be cleaned to resemble what it was new.

"Yes, it is a mystery." Hannibal pondered, while he noticed the way Will's eyes settled on the fireplace, it caused his own eyes to follow the path. Where he found nothing that could take the other man's attention from him, leaving Hannibal to conclude that Will was once again becoming victim to his own mind. Hannibal moved his arm around Will's shoulder and pulled him close to his side. The action was enough to draw Will out of his own caged thought, even causing him to let out an "oof" as he was pulled close to Hannibal. Who then leaned back on the headboard, dragging Will with him as he did so, trapping the man to his

side as they settled into place. Hannibal could not understand this peculiar instinct that had fallen upon him, he could nearly label it as a need if he wanted to come off as desperate. Because before Will, the act of physical contact was something he never truly sought out in others. There were the social cues that called for handshakes, a hand on the lower back with some others, and if he knew someone well enough and felt that they were worthy enough as more than a name on a list and a conversation perhaps the occasional graceful hug that never could last more than a few heartbeats, four were standard, six if he was being generous. And when it came to after a night of passion with past partners, Hannibal understood the need from some to cuddle with him, wrap their sex heavy arms around him as they laid their head on his chest, he knew why others felt that way and at some point, he found a small weak part of him that managed to survive all his years also felt that. But what he felt with Will was different from that, it was not the aftermath of the love they made, those hormones and chemicals had all faded away from him. Yet he still felt that need to hold the man close to him, to keep his arm securely around Will's shoulder, and the need to bury himself into those messy locks that begged for him to tame them.

Hannibal could not form into words why he suddenly found himself with this clingy need for the man. It grated at his mind like jagged nails and rubbed against his spine like an affectionate cat. He shouldn't feel this way for Will, feel this weak for the man he held so close to his side, he made love with, he fell for. That was it, that disgusting human emotion, he had fallen, casted down and left with charred wings and forming horns. He had met the archangel last night and they had cast him towards the fiery pits of internal damnation. But not towards the hell fire that children would read about in Sunday school and made to fear until the day they grew old and crumpled away. This was his own hellscape, he could feel how Will had managed to find the beating muscle that harden over time and cracked it open, peering inside it with soft observation laced with pure curiosity and understanding. Before he gingerly reached in with hands that could both be callous and soft, take life and if needed give it. With those hands that could cast Hannibal down, he took the man's heart and held it, held it with no ill intention, but those hands could also turn wicked when provoke and could strike with pression. Knowing what weak points to hit that would cause the most damage, the danger this all provoked for him, the risk that laid out in front of him, ready to strike with each ticking of the clock.

How long could they last together before they turned on one another, he walked in the light and flourished in the darkness, while Will kept himself chained in the light, but a part of him longed for the darkness. He had wanted Will when Miranda had her talons and teeth sunk into him with intentions no one knew until Will was left bleeding out, blood pooling around him and eyes glossy. Now that Hannibal had him in his jaws, he did not know what to do, should he bite down and sever the artery, or just hold him in his maw. Both with consequences with the same weight in his mind, he both faced a loss he was unsure he could handle all over again.

"What now?" Will asked and it was almost jarring the question, because Hannibal found himself pondering the same thing. Proof that they could still share the same thought without even realizing it, a reason to hold on tighter.

"While you slept, I had thought of perhaps making eggs that would be nestled in a tomato sauce consisting of basil, garlic, onion, along with cannellini beans and Italian sausage. The

meal is a classic Italian dish known in English as eggs purgatory, where it grants the name is for how." Hannibal was cut off when Will shifted to sit up, still not escaping Hannibal's grip, but he was able to move to look the man in the face.

"That's not I ment Hannibal," Will said as he looked upon the man with a somewhat serious expression, a look Hannibal knew what Will was referring to. He wanted to know about them, he knew that was what Will had ment when he had asked the question. He chose to ignore it, for the need to have Will speak his mind more clearly. Not hiding behind simple question that could hold multiple answers to. If Will wanted the right topic he must ask more properly. "I ment," Will gestured between them. "Us, what do we do now, what do we do about ourselves as we move forward? Because I don't want to play with the false native that what happened last night was the making of a one-night fling and then we return to a world where it never had happened in the first place." Will looked at him with a harden stance, he ment what he had said, Will knew he could not get out of this bed, get dress, have breakfast and then go back to his home and act like the night prior never happened. He could make an attempt and pretend to ignore the scorch marks left on his ribcage. But that could only last for so long, before those marks turned to etches and those etches began to corrode him to the point he was crumbling. Then he would find himself back where he stood after Miranda, living in another suit that would not let anyone near him, let anyone in and for once Will asked himself if he could survive the isolation, he had built around him.

Hannibal reached out and cupped the side of Will's face as he buried his eyes into the others, to the point he knew Will could not break the eye contact even if tried. "Neither do I my dearest Will, I do not want last night to be a meaningless one-off occurrence and to think that you had thought I would, is such a dagger to my soul." Hannibal watched as guilt flickered across Will's features, it had provoked the urge to smirk with pride to know he could still strum at the man's guilty conscience with such ease, the possibilities that brought to life. "I do not wish for what we shared last night to be the last of its kind and I do not wish for you to leave myside today thinking that there is not a chain that connects us. A chain I would like to believe is difficult to break."

"But what does that make us?" Will asked with an undertone of vulnerability that he knew made him sound weak and craving. Craving to slip into something where he was no longer seen as alone, where it was not only him, but him and someone else. He hated the fact he found himself it that state of mind where he feared the isolation he once called home, not after having the taste of what partnership was exactly like. And to see that there was a chance he could enter that land once more, a realm where he had someone by his side, someone who could see him as all of him and could want nothing else. Only him with flaws and all, he found himself craving it like a starved animal.

Hannibal looked upon Will, his gaze softening while his thumb began to rub soothingly along the man's cheek. "I believe that makes us one and the same. For we both crave the other in more than just a carnal way. We crave the other in both mind and body and if that makes it seem we are moving too fast when it comes to labeling us as partners then so be it," Hannibal leaned forward, pressing their foreheads together and he could feel Will once again melt under the physical contact. "Because we both knew for some time there was something lingering between us like whisps of smoke that had connected us for the longest time. We only hid behind the vail of uncertainty and ignorance to realize it sooner."

Another chuff of tired laughter escaped Will as a small crooked smile played at his lips. “That’s sounds about right, both of us too blind and focused on something that circled around us to notice what lied in the center all along.” Will pulled back from Hannibal’s hold in favor to go back to resting against him. Feeling Hannibal’s arm tighten around his shoulder as he pulled him in close while Will placed his head back onto Hannibal’s shoulder. “But since it seems that we are going to walk down this newly found pathway we discovered, I must warn you we face fire along the way.”

“That thought has accord to me, though we do voice that we are technically not doctor and patient in the ethical manner, clinging with the defense of having conversations. We are still viewed that way by others.” Hannibal’s mind focused on how Alana would react when such news entered her world, how she would handle the idea of him and Will being in a relationship, because at the moment she stood as only the real threat to what they had. Jack would always turn a blind eye to it as long as Will was well enough for the field, but Doctor Bloom? No, no she could not sit idly by, she would voice her opinion on the matter, but it would be hard to predict which opinion she would speak of.

He found himself looking back to how Alana had looked at him that night he had her over to prepare a dinner together and dig for more information on the still new to his Will Graham. How the woman would flash him a soft flirtatious smile now and then when she believed he was looking in her direction, how she would angle her body as though she was a bird puffing out her feathers to help catch his attention when he showed the slightest amount of interest in having his eyes on her. Any way to show that there might be something they could have, something that night could lead to down the road if they both continued to be single for longer than they wanted. Before she casually brought up the knowledge about the rumor that someone one had spread about the two having an affair together and then the question of why they never had was brought up to change the twirling subject back to where it started. Though the question was never fully answered more left with pondering thought spoken out loud, Hannibal knew why the affair had never had happened.

It was simply truly and unruly simple, he had never found her worth being connected to in a relationship she had wanted with him. Of course he was not blind, he had found her pretty, similar to how one would comment a growing flower they passed sitting in a nursey window display. Something that could grow outside its sheltered pot, but could also die in nature, either the soft delicate peddles would thrive or they would slowly wither up and fall. Later on, he had found potential in their relationship by setting up a safety net with her, making her yet another pawn in his chest game which she unknowingly slotted into with such ease, so much so that Hannibal questioned the lack of difficulty it took. With that memory reawakening in the cannibals mind he could not help, but feel a kind of dark pleasure at the idea of Alana finding out what he and Will had done, how her face would try not to show the perhaps heartache at the idea that he had taken Will to bed instead of her, how she would question why the anti-social empath, who had shown clear distain for the doctor from their first interaction had found himself tied to Hannibal’s side. After all, on the outside they were nearly complete opposites in so many ways and yet they somehow found themselves in a relationship. It would be both heart shattering and confusing for the younger woman.

That would be where she would end up facing two opinions to voice and two opinions to act upon. Alana would face her duty as a physiatrist to inform dear Uncle Jack the breakage of

ethics shared between Will and Hannibal, the breakage between patient and doctor, that a relationship had taken place and turned into something with an unhealthy power imbalance. It was her given duty, the oath she had taken to inform the board of what had happened and how he did not only turn Will away, but acted upon his own emotions as well. But if she did that, she risked not only her relationship with Hannibal as a close friend, but the relationship to Will as well. And how she often cherished the idea that Will had let her in, the way he had, opening only slightly for her, even though she was too a physiatrist. Would she risk that in order to let Jack know what Will and Hannibal had become, because if she did, she would also be risking Will's mental health along with the empath's friendship, because he and Will would have to part in the end or lose everything they had. Be forced to choose between their lively hoods and their relationship, because in reality he and Alana both knew Will would sever his ties to him if that ment Hannibal could keep his job. The self-sacrificing fool that Will was, ready to throw himself in front of a striking sword, before it could harm anyone else that stood in its path. Will would rather suffer than see others do the same in the long run. Cut himself out as if he was a cancerous tumor and Hannibal was the body he had infected. The question was could dear Alana handle that guilt, that would follow, to witness the shell Will would for certainty become after their separation. She hardly could stand to witness Will after Miranda, imagine Will after him. Far worse for the empath than anyone could predict.

That dark twisted thought of the oncoming chaos brough a twisted dark thrill into Hannibal's mind. To watch as the world around them tried to adapt to them, not want to see them suffer apart, because it would surely bring decay for the structure, they had built around them. The silent struggle others would face, the struggle Will would face. Torn between wanting the best for them both and wanting to free them of the crumbling world that threatened them. To hold onto Hannibal and not let go, but also not want to drag him down. Brining another reason to clutch onto Hannibal for support, while he whispered acts of sin into Will's ear disguised as offerings to the gods. Bring up reasons it would be best to sever the ties Will still clutched onto that were not him, that way they both did not have to suffer, because without the other they would. An unexpected opportunity lied in wait for them both. Nearly making it hard for him to wait for word to get out about them. To watch the sparks, turn into chaotic flames that fed on anything in their pathways, with no care for repercussion, it would be beautiful.

"But, let's not focus long on the fire that has not yet burned a single branch on our pathway," Hannibal spoke with a gentle tone as he leaned over and pressed his mouth to the top of Will's head. He could still smell the weak remain of whatever the man used as a shampoo and conditioner, but he could also smell a mixture of distinctly Will and himself. Hannibal had already planned by the end of the day it would be mostly himself he would smell on Will. Hannibal pulled back to lean on the headboard, "let us think of the pathway that's face us today."

"I'll tell you this, I plan to at least go home at some point." Will spoke as he shifted, but not taking his head off of Hannibal's shoulder. "I know you secretly get a kick out of seeing me in your clothes, but I honestly will feel more comfortable wearing something that was bought off the rack."

“Understandable. Though I must comment that I do find you attractive when you are not wearing something off the rack, or anything at all.”

Will rolled his eyes and he could not stop the amused smile that formed. “But I’m technically not supposed to be home until at the latest Monday.” Will said choosing not to make a comment on what Hannibal just told him. “Giving me a free three-day weekend. With no papers to grade, no cases to go over and most importantly no calls from Jack.”

“What will he ever do without you at his beck and call.”

“His actual job for once.” Will shifted again pressing more into Hannibal’s side and he could feel the man slightly dig his fingers in his shoulder. To secure Will more to him, as if he was preparing for a the time Will would pull away and he was telling him that if he tried there would be a struggle. “The more important question would be what will we do?”

A hum of thought escaped Hannibal and Will could feel the vibration that was caused by it. “I had plans to gift you with something last night and before you open that wicked mouth of yours. No, it was not of what we had done in this bed.” Will closed his mouth and waited for Hannibal to continue. “I was perusing a few online stores a while ago, looking for a gift for a former colleague of mine whose retirement is a month away,” Hannibal reached up and once again began to run his fingers through Will’s hair. “When I had stumbled upon that movie you had told me about a few months ago, *The Phantom of The Opera*, the nineteen twenty-five renditions as I do recall and I could not stop myself from purchasing it. I had hoped to have given it to you last night as one more offering in my apology.”

Will angled his head so he could look up at the older man, who still held him close. With a look of soft astonishment and warmth as if Hannibal had just given him the world instead of mentioning a movie he had purchased for him. “You remembered that? I only told you about it once and it was just filler if anything, not really much to think about.”

“Nonsense, you told me how you always wanted to view the movie, but never had the time or mental space to enjoy it fully.” Hannibal spoke with a sternness that made Will’s remark seem as though it were an insult to Will himself. “I believe our time together for the next three days have given you what you waited for, for so long.”

Will looked up at Hannibal, taking in his soft features, the words he had just given him and there it was again the feather of warmth that fluttered around his chest. Wiving in and out of his ribs, before turning towards his nerves and calling each and every one of them its own. Making them glow with the brightness of a new moon, all because the man that held him remembered such an unimportant detail and gifted him with it. Paired with the idea that they would sit down on the couch to watch the movie that had played a small part in his childhood, to watch and experience it together. It had the flutter acting as though it was caught in a whirlwind as it traveled through Will’s body. The idea that he and Hannibal would be doing something so mondain as watching an old movie together, it had that feather of warmth that had been haunting him for months that showed itself for both Hannibal and Miranda. Will could now finally understand why it would show itself, it was the feeling of being domestic with the person he found himself cherishing.

Will leaned upward and placed a gentle kiss on Hannibal's lips. A soft gesture, not ment to provoked any heated lust pumping feelings, it was kiss that spoke of how Will truly felt of the gesture that most would view as small, but he did not. It was his thanks for thinking of him, thinking about something he had spoken interest in and listened to his words when Hannibal did not have. He had made a mental note and kept it pinned in his mind until the topic was ever brought up, Hannibal did not have to, but he did. He had thought of him and that was enough for Will, to be thought of and it brought on a tender feeling inside of him. It deserved a thank you that he could not put into words. Will slowly pulled away and returned to resting his head on Hannibal's shoulder, while Hannibal went back to running his fingers through Will's curls. Understanding what Will ment, by the kiss and basking in the soft pleasure it brought on. It made Hannibal recall all the gifts that Will had received and how though they showed a great length of wealth and devotion, the hardly held that warmth an actual gift ment. They shined and shimmered, but they were not Will Graham, they were what the presenter thought would fit the man, but never could perfectly slot into place. What he had done was a demonstration of that, that he knew what Will wanted, what he desired and he could provide, he would always provide.

They stayed in that position until Will took in a large breath through his nose and shifted ever so slightly, head digging into Hannibal's shoulder and hand clenching and unclenching Hannibal's shirt. Hannibal could tell the man was about to reveal something to him, the way Will shifted, how he clutched for him as if he might pull away at any moment. Along with the way Will's tongue licked at his lips; another habit Hannibal had to teach him how to control, followed by another deep breath.

"Miranda," Will paused for a moment to gather himself, "Miranda, she wrote to me the other day. A letter appeared in my mail from her." Will spoke, his voice haunted, weighing nothing as the air caught it and held his reveal with ease. Hannibal stopped his motion of absent mindless running his fingers through Will's hair, feeling a small twinge of that tar that dared to be reborn. Bubbling in small burst as he felt the heated acidic gunk splash against his ribs and threaten to burn. To leave marks as they attempted to break through the ribcage and explore the rest of him like before, infected the grounds they use to haunt. His fingers slowly curled around the brown locks they had treated so gently before. They wanted to fully grasp those curls and harshly pull on them, just give Will a taste of the sharp pain, he felt as he was reminded that thought the woman was behind bars, she still had some touch to the outside world and still thought about Will. But Hannibal took in his own stealthier deep inhale, gathering himself, before Will could pick up on the harsh emotions that wanted to crawl to the surface. To make themselves known, to infect the empaths mind and make him regret ever brining her up in their moment together. Instead, Hannibal made it clear to his emotions that this was a gift in some aspects, Will was opening up to him when he did not have to. When Hannibal wasn't pulling on his jaw or forcing his cranium open from bashing it with a mental hammer and clawing through it.

"And what per say did this letter of hers hold for you Will?"

"I'm not sure, I didn't even bother to open it let alone read it," Will spoke before he licked his bottom lip again and absent mindlessly bit into the flesh. "I threw it in the fireplace and watched it burn." His words sounded as if they held shame for such an intense reaction to

getting a simple letter. “I didn’t want to know what she would have to say to me that she hadn’t already.”

What a destructive vengeful creature you are my dearest Will. Most would have tossed the letter or returned to sundered. But not you, instead you built a fire in your home and set the piece of paper ablaze, what emotions must have rained down upon you as you stood my and watched. Watched as those papers turned to ash and yet your eyes could still see them as if they were indestructible. Did you shed a tear? No, I highly doubt it, I believe you have you shed your last tear for her long ago. Hannibal thought while the image of Will standing in front of his fireplace, watching the letter be taken by flames. Curling in on itself as the fire ate at it, consumed it with its unforgiving flames and destroyed whatever words they held for the intended reader to consume. While he stood there with a stoic expression, not saying anything, not thinking of anything but of the burning note that became victim to the fire, much of how Will was a victim to Miranda. Hannibal could not help his own curiosity, wondering what she had to say to Will after she spent many nights and days locked behind bars, stripped of her fought for status. Becoming just another body amongst many with nothing to her, but the gruesome deeds she had committed.

“It was the correct action to take, why rip open wounds that still not yet had the chance to heal properly. Why expose yourself to the knife that cut you so deep to the point of nerve damage.” Hannibal placed another kiss to the top of Will’s head. “When now you are moving forward, no longer held in the deceitful web she had trapped you in for the longest time. Not when you are finally healing from the wounds, she had inflicted onto you.”

Will was silent for a while, he did not move in Hannibal’s hold, there were no signs of his nervous ticks. He was completely motionless; it grew to the point it made Hannibal wonder if Will had slipped back into his mind. Becoming trapped in the labyrinth that it was and was at the time while he held onto him was looking for a way.

“You’re right,” Will finally said, his voice back to that airy haunting that it had before except there was a subtle amount of weight it held. Making it difficult for the room around them to catch those words and carry them away as though they ment nothing. Will shifted himself to look up at Hannibal again, with noticeable gloss in his eyes. “Now that I am finally healing.” He said with a small tired smile that in time would reach his eyes, Hannibal easily returned that smile, those his was more pleased to hear from Will himself that he was recovering and with the indication it was with his help in the matter.

Hannibal did not respond to Will’s reveal of agreement, instead he leaned down and placed a soft kiss to Will’s forehead. Lips lingering for a few heartbeats more than six, before he placed his head to rest on top of Will’s and pulled him tight to his side, with no interest of letting go anytime in the near future. *Yes, you are finally healing and I am the one that aid in your recovering. You are finally in my arms, in my grasp where you will stay until otherwise. Because you were always ment to be mine Will Graham, always ment to be with me and no one else. The sun was ment to set on the earth, the dog ment to be loyal to its master and you my dearest Will were ment to be mine and mine alone. Until the heavens and hell split us apart from this earthly realm and we are to unit in the astral plans. Because even death could not prevent me from letting go of you. You are mine and I am yours.*

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for sticking with me and thanks for enjoying it. It was a blast to write this and I like to believe younger me would have loved what I had accomplished. She definitely would be awestruck to say at least that I didn't abandoned it and I wrote such a creation.

Fun Fact Time
-Miranda was purposely written to have little to no details, I only wrote some to help have something for the reader to go off of and help with the plot. The rest was left up to you guys, I wanted you guys to in vison what The Black Widow and Miranda looked like, who you could believe would be able to not only seduce those men, but also catch Will's eye as well. That's why I never gave any description such as her body, height, or ethnicity. I wanted you guys to in vison her how ever you wanted to, hell you could have made her look like you if you wanted to. I honestly could not tell you who I imagined as Miranda, mostly because I want you guys to have an untainted vision of her and also because I really can't lol.
-There are two references to two characters Hugh Dancy played both named Adam.
-Miranda was originally going to be just a visitor, she was going to be staying at a hotel for most of the story, where she then was going to tell Will she had to leave back home and hopefully they could stay in touch, But then that changed to perhaps hey having an apartment to finally having a house.
-Miranda was also going to by way more toxic when I was first coming up with her, but that all changed, because she became one of those characters that simply wrote themselves which was for the best because I like her this way. Her first draft version had her way more possessive of Will and nearly hostile towards any woman that knew him, but I thought better of that. Because then she wouldn't be likeable to not only the reader but to Will and everyone else.
-One of my favorite parts to write were glances into Will's childhood, it was fun to take creative liberty into making up what he was not only like as a kid, but what he grew up with. I picture Will's dad as a man who did just barely above the bare minimum for his son, more of a provider less of a parent. But could still act like a father when needed.
-My favorite title would have to be Green Silk Suit, I like how is sounds out loud :)
-My favorite chapter to write would either be A Bid For Your Attention, because Miranda and Hannibal, To Force A Steady Hand because of the glimpse into domestic life between Will and Hannibal, Or All Is Fair because you get not only petty Hannibal, but jealous and possessive Hannibal along with the whole to of them in a hard wear store was fun to write.
-My favorite line I wrote was “Yep, you Will Graham have found yourself involved with a sugar mommy.”
- And Finally Fenrir was never actually ment to be a sort of character in the story, it happened because I was looking for a painting for both Will to be drawn too and something Hannibal might of as well. While looking for inspiration, I recalled about the Norse tale and boom he was cemented into the story. He played a bigger part than expected.

Once again I want to thank all of you for sticking around with me while I wrote this, it's been a fun time and I'll miss it a lot. But hey there is a whole HEU out there for me to sink my teeth into and I've been looking at SpaceDogs recently so who knows ;). Anyway thanks for the comments and kudos and your time. See ya around :)

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